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Do We Believe?

An Analysis of a Great
Correspondence

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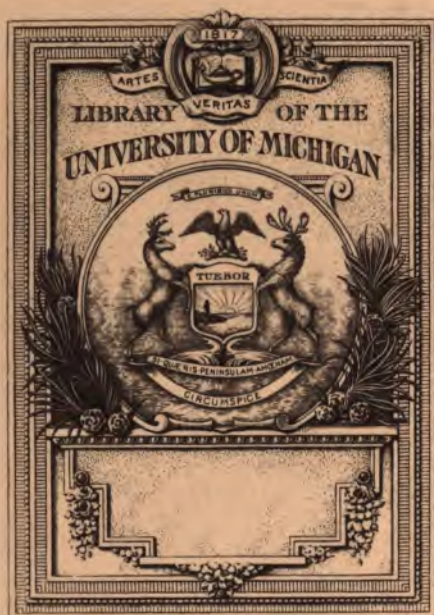
JOHN ALLAN HEDDERWICK

[Issued for the Rationalist Press Association, Ltd.]

WATTS & CO.,

17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

1904





DO WE BELIEVE?

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An Analysis of a Great Correspondence

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JOHN ALLAN HEDDERWICK

[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED]



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PREFACE

ONE of the contributors to the *Daily Telegraph* controversy on the subject, "Do We Believe?" remarked that the columns of that journal had been transformed into a public confession-box. This is substantially true, and the great interest of the discussion lies in the fact that the letters contain the frank, uninspired views of the average man and woman. To the student of contemporary religious movements there can be no more instructive documents than these spontaneous confessions; and for that reason alone it would be useful to analyse their contents and summarise what might be called the popular verdict on the question of religion.

But that is not the only excuse for the following pages. In spite of the professions of faith which a large number of the letters contain, it is obvious from the mere dimensions of the controversy (before the end of the sixth week the letters received would have filled 1,600 columns of the *Daily Telegraph*) that the trust of the public in the fundamental soundness of Christian dogmas has been seriously shaken. There has been an epidemic, if I may use the word, of serious interrogation. And the majority of the letters published show that there exists a real "will to believe," and, at the same time, a feeling that the beliefs still current in the Churches are not tenable in the light of modern knowledge.

In such circumstances, the feeling underlying the letters is that the Churches are approaching a crisis. People are asking not only "Do We Believe?" but "What is Belief?" This far more deep and important question does not seem to occur in a definite form to many of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondents; and that fact encourages the attempt to examine the popular foundations of religious belief as expressed in the letters, and to show why it is not continuing to meet with general acceptance. At the same time, I have endeavoured to show what are the only foundations of a stable belief, in the religious or any other sense. My final aim has been to prove that the same agencies which have led to the dissolution of the old creeds are atoning for the work of destruction by building up, on the basis of knowledge and on logical principles, a higher faith.

J. A. H.

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CHAPTER I.

THE ALLEGED PREVALENCE OF RELIGIOUS INDIFFERENCE

IF a social observer of ordinary acuteness had been asked, a short time ago, what was the characteristic attitude of the masses towards religion, he would have answered, without much hesitation : Indifference. The phenomena on which such an opinion could be based were surely plain enough. There was the obvious fact that the majority of people were absorbed in the practical problems of the struggle for existence, striving, with varying degrees of ability and success, but with almost uniform persistence, to realise a purely worldly ambition. The very leisure which seems necessary for the contemplation of spiritual things and the cultivation of religious thought was denied to the mass of the people. Far from professing to serve God as well as Mammon, the average man had grown to regard God as an abstraction bearing no relation to the affairs of actual life ; and he had been almost obliged, by the economic pressure of these affairs and the force of tacit public opinion, to bow the knee to Mammon in his home as well as in the market-place.

Nor were positive manifestations of indifference to religion, in its sense, less apparent. The statistics of church attendance compiled by a London newspaper merely pictured figures what was already known as a substantial fact—that the tenets of supernatural faith were becoming more and more deserted. No one can have been surprised to learn that only one person out of nine, on the average, attended a place of public worship in London. The struggles of the Churches themselves, by means of ornate services, paid choirs, sermons on popular subjects, pleasant Sunday afternoons, and all sorts of social functions, to stimulate and retain the interest of their congregations, were unmistakable signs that the clergy were aware of their diminishing hold on the minds and hearts of the people.

At no time were the churches, as a whole, more wealthy or better organised, from a campaign point of view ; but never, judged by their power over the ideals and actions of the people, was their influence less apparent. There is a striking disproportion between the

means at their command and the results they are able to claim.

And of those who give their formal adherence to Christianity by observance of its ceremonies, how many, the observer might have asked, are really genuine in their faith? Although indifference may be widespread, and although the increasing growth of large cities may, by reducing the influence of social opinion in its narrow sense, make it a matter of no prejudice to a man in his private and business life that he does not attend church, there are many suburban, urban, and especially rural communities where church attendance is the only door to social respect. It is needless to harp on this familiar phenomenon; its significance in this connection lies in the fact that even from the meagre statistics of church adherence we have to deduct an indefinite number representing the non-believing but outwardly conforming element. By giving a narrow definition to the term religious belief we could reduce the number of true believers to a still smaller fraction of the whole community; but even with the widest possible meaning of the term, stretched to include the Unitarians as well as the Roman Catholics, the army that can be collected under its banner is so small that Mammon need not fear any serious rebellion in the kingdom he holds so securely.

In the deliberations of the Church Congresses, Synods, and Assemblies, religious indifference has been a never-failing source of discussion. The multitude of cures suggested is surely a clear enough indication that the trouble is a serious one. Yet not all the efforts of organised wealth and anxious professionalism will make the great public *dance to their piping*. The response is

lacking. Prayers, expostulations, warnings, cajolements, fall upon deaf ears, and the strenuous efforts to make church services attractive to men, as well as to women, have only the partial success which seems more disheartening than failure. Good preachers we have; but do they stir the people as did Kingsley, Maurice, Robertson, and many others in the days of livelier religious feeling? If they do, it is only on some political subject which has no more reference to the essentials of religion than the licensing question has to the validity of belief in the miraculous.

With all these symptoms so clear, so conspicuous, it would seem to be contrary to fact to deny that indifference is the key-note of popular feeling towards religion of any kind. It is a phenomenon which Rationalists, in their enthusiasm for the spread of a new ideal, have also to consider. Years ago, when I began to write largely on the subject of religion, a friend, whose acquaintance with the higher literary, scientific, and political circles of London could hardly be surpassed, somewhat dashed my ardour by saying, after he had read some of my articles, that people did not care for theology nowadays one way or the other. At that time it seemed amazing to me that the generality of people could be content without a search for fundamental ideas, and be indifferent whether the accepted ideas were partly true or altogether false. And while subsequent widening of the circle of knowledge has in a way confirmed the opinion that the majority of people do not care whether the churches bow down to illusion or to truth, it has at the same time given ground for a contradiction to the theory of prevailing indifference.

Personal experience in such matters may be a somewhat unsatisfactory guide, but probably many other people will confirm the opinion that if we give religion its widest possible meaning as the embodiment of the highest ideal of life, and if we get behind the conventional exterior of men, we find a very real and active interest in the subject. In former days people used to discuss theology with the same frequency as we now discuss politics; but nowadays men do not discuss their personal beliefs until they are on a footing of considerable intimacy. For various reasons—the multiplication of new shades of belief and unbelief, the persistence of the stigma attached to avowed non-conformity with the formal orthodoxy, and, perhaps, an increasing sense of consideration for the feelings of other people—we have reached a stage at which it has become hardly polite to mention religion in mixed company.

But because religion is banished from the list of permitted subjects in social intercourse, and because nine men out of ten whom we meet in the course of daily business never mention the word, it does not follow that they have no interest in it whatever. Further acquaintance usually reveals that most men have very definite opinions on the subject, even though they may not devote much time or thought to the analysis of these opinions. Their indifference, in short, is merely superficial. When the inner man is dissected, it would be surprising if some convictions, some deep-seated grains of interest, were not discovered.

Such general arguments may, however, fail to convince the average mind that there is a widespread and a real interest on the subject of religious beliefs and ideals. It may be said that an

interest which is hidden and inarticulate is equal in practice to no interest at all. But within the last few months that interest has found expression in a manner which must convince the social observer referred to above that religious indifference is merely a veneer which covers a contrasting intensity of feeling.

On the 29th of September, 1904, a letter appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* under the heading: "Do we Believe?" With the contents of that letter I shall deal immediately. The point of present interest lies in the magnitude of the correspondence that followed. "Silly season" discussions on marriage and other problems of acknowledged general interest have reached considerable dimensions in the columns of this and other papers, but no newspaper correspondence, it seems safe to say, has ever proved so overwhelming as the responses to the question, "Do we Believe?" At the end of the first week it was reported that the letters received would, on a moderate estimate, have filled at least 200 columns of the *Daily Telegraph*. At the close of the third week the total number of letters would, if printed, have occupied more than 800 columns of the paper. The total number of words which they contained were estimated at over one million and a half. Only a minority of the letters were printed, and the editor was obliged to repeat a demand for brevity. At that time, moreover, the letters were arriving in greater numbers than before, both from England and abroad.

These figures dispose at once of the theory that religious indifference—meaning indifference to religious problems—is a general feature of the age. Indifference to the claims of the

Churches there may be, but not indifference to the questions which the Churches are supposed to answer. It must not be forgotten that the number of people who take an active part in a newspaper controversy is always small compared with the number of those who follow it with interest. The majority of people are quick to read but slow to write. Many of the letters show indirectly that the correspondence has been widely read; and we may take it for granted that the willingness of *The Daily Telegraph* to continue publishing several columns each day during the progress of a great war, and in spite of an international crisis which would have been fatal to the usual "silly season" discussion on subjects more "popular" in character, is evidence that the circulation of the paper was sensibly increased by the unusual contents. In the light of such evidence one is almost entitled to say that there is no subject upon which the interest of the mass of the public is more keen or more genuine.

The theory that the soul of the people is indifferent to the deepest of all problems is not the only one which this newspaper discussion has served to contradict. Only about one out of ten letters received came from women. Those that were published revealed the usual signs of the emotional faith—faith based on the desire for consolation and the need of dependence on some extraneous support—which is characteristic of women. But after allowing for the fact that women are even less ready than men to take up the unfamiliar pen, the great preponderance of the male element upsets the idea that women are far more concerned with matters of faith than are members of the other sex.

Here, once more, we must draw a distinction between interest in church matters and interest in the fundamental problems of religion. Women are the mainstay of established faiths which men neglect: their hearts inspire them with a devotion to priest and prayer which their heads never question with serious endeavour to prove their value. It is the women nowadays who are the "church workers," and the men who also take part in outward religious activities do so in a very large number of cases from a more or less laudable desire to please their feminine relations. The preponderance of women in church is only too familiar, and is fully borne out by the statistics of church attendance already mentioned. One writer in *The Daily Telegraph* controversy writes, with humorous pathos: "Only to-day in a big church in a big town I felt myself a stray in a regiment of women."

It is impossible, however, to draw the inference that women are more absorbed in the problems of religion than their husbands and brothers. On the contrary, the intellectual concern of men in questions of doctrine is not shared by women, and the feminine neglect of such questions exists, probably, in direct proportion to the intensity of their emotional faith. It is the Church, with its ritual, its spirit of dominance, its social attractions, that appeals to feminine instincts; it is Religion, with its striving for an ideal and its search for the meaning of existence, that appeals to the less affectable nature of man.

In view of the impression which this controversy has made on the public mind, and of the almost universal interest taken in its progress, no apology is required for an attempt to analyse the

various expressions of opinion regarding the foundations and features of belief, and to consider them in the light of those principles of Rationalism which are rapidly permeating the minds of thoughtful men. A further inducement to consider this mass of testimony is afforded by the peculiar fact that it contains, not the ideas of professional apologists (apart from the frequent letters written by ministers), but the uninspired, frank opinions of every-day men and women. Some allowance has to be made for the circumstance that the letters published

were selected, and that, in selecting them, there was probably a tendency, conscious or unconscious, to give greater publicity to certain points of view. That may explain the comparative scarcity of letters expressing the Rationalist view of the questions of belief, although it is known that a large number of those letters were written. The want of a definite Rationalist element in the published correspondence is a further justification for a Rationalistic treatment of the views expressed, and of the question "Do we Believe?" itself.

CHAPTER II.

THE DECAY OF DOGMATIC BELIEF

WHILE the magnitude of the correspondence illustrates the wide range of interest in questions of religious belief, the form which it has taken indicates, in a not less graphic way, the general attitude towards the recognised forms of that belief. In the present chaotic condition of church teaching, it is almost impossible to point to any class of belief which may be taken as representing "belief" as a whole. Faith is a genus with innumerable species, many of them mutually antagonistic in a high degree. But if we take a broad view, regarding as belief the acceptance of any one of the forms of Christianity, then the question, "Do we Believe?" almost answers itself. The mere fact of asking it, in the twentieth century of the Christian Era, is a reply in the direct negative. Here we touch upon one of the most interesting features

of the correspondence: the light which it throws upon the progress which has been made in the disintegration of dogmatic belief, and the accompanying development of freedom of thought.

In order to appreciate the great significance of the discussion from this point of view, a comparison with previous controversies is necessary.

One of the writers in the *Daily Telegraph* asks, in a tone of half-conviction that his fear is justified, whether the Reformation was not too great a trial for the spirit of faith, and whether the Renaissance, with its dazzling revelation of ancient knowledge and its brilliant inspiration of art and literature, did not blind mankind to the sense of its dependence upon higher powers. The writer's fear of the effects of human independence may be dis-

counted as a result of, not a source or a reason for belief in, supernatural guidance; but there is no doubt about his suggestion that the Reformation was the origin of the changes which have led up to the asking of the question, "Do we Believe?" The Reformation was the first great revolt against the supremacy of the Roman Church; and that revolt has been the seed of innumerable protests, great and small, of a similar character, against various forms of dogmatic authority.

No doubt it is true, in one sense, that the Reformation was merely the exchange of one form of authority for another. The absolute "Thou Shalt" of the church was replaced merely by the absolute "Thou Shalt Not" of the Bible. Divine rule as embodied in the true church was exchanged for Divine rule as expressed in the true Word of God. Nevertheless, the schism was a blow to the almost unquestioned right of authority, a challenge to men to think about matters which formerly were supposed to be taken on trust. Further, the principle of liberty of conscience was affirmed in theory if not acted up to in practice. Seekers after truth were recommended to search the Scriptures diligently, which they did to such purpose that there are now over one hundred Christian sects and an increasing multitude of societies and individuals who consider that each one of these sects is making a radical mistake in its interpretation of the Bible. Anyone gifted with the power of prophecy at the time of the Reformation could easily have forecast this evolution of warring sects; no doubt the Roman Catholics of that day were fully aware of the danger, just as they are conscious nowadays of *the strength which they gain from ap-*

pealing to an unchanging church, and not to a Book which every second man regards in a different light. It was inevitable that different interpretations should gradually be given to a volume which, as we are now informed by the Dean of Westminster, contains difficulties which a life-time of study does not remove. For a long time the sacred awe which the Bible inspired prevented the exercise of the true critical spirit and checked any excursions into heretical interpretations. And even when, in later years, such interpretations were made the basis of new orthodoxies, there was no questioning of fundamentals. The Bible remained the acknowledged Word of God, although there was continual, and often acrimonious, discussion of what various parts of it were intended to mean. Out of these discussions, and out of disputes on the proper principles of church constitution and government, rose the various sects whose conflicting claims add to the confusion of the seeker after the true religion.

But, although they were divided among themselves, they showed a united front to the enemy of Rationalism. The liberty of conscience which they acknowledged in the case of choosing among religions was not allowed to be exercised in criticising the foundations of supernatural faith. Thus the church, as a whole, survived the attacks of eighteenth century free thought, which embodied an amazing amount of critical ability. The nineteenth century found it practically unshaken, with the power to inflict a great deal of hardship on any one who would dare to ask, "Do we Believe?" At that time the principle of liberty of thought, and of liberty of expression of thought—so forcibly defended by John Stuart Mill

in his essay, *On Liberty*—would have been regarded as almost criminal in relation to religious matters. "Heresy Hunts" were the grim joy of the orthodox, in Scotland at least; and the tyrannies of the Inquisition were continued, on a modified scale, with the aid of the instruments of social ostracism—more potent, sometimes, in obtaining recantations than were the thumb-screw and rack of earlier days.

To what, then, do we owe the freedom of discussion which has made the *Daily Telegraph* correspondence possible? We owe it to the decay of the power of religious dogma to enforce submission, and that decay is the outcome of three causes: the multiplication of sects, the courage of individual Rationalists, and the spread of knowledge. To the first cause, perhaps, least of all, since we have seen that while the opposing claims of the various sects reduced the power of dogma below the standard of countries where, as in France, there is practically only one church—the Roman—there was no relaxation of the antagonism with which all the sects regarded attacks upon fundamental Christian doctrines. To the second cause we owe much more; and, to the third, certainly most of all.

In some of the *Daily Telegraph* letters I have noticed the familiar feeling of objection to "blatant infidelity" (as it is called), and to free thought in any of its downright, outspoken forms. While this objection is in some ways a reflection of the greater sensitiveness people now have in discussing religion openly, it would be difficult for the correspondents to deny that this type of free-thought has done much to make the "Do we Believe?" discussion possible. It would be out of place nowadays, partly because it

is out of date and unnecessary. Its pioneering work, which was directed to secure the very freedom of discussion which has been taken advantage of in the *Daily Telegraph*, had to be done with a vigour equal to the stubbornness with which the citadel of belief was defended against attack. We have no Bradlaughs and no Ingersolls to-day because their work is done, and the men who continue it do so on the lines of moderate scholarly persuasion because the openness and freedom of discussion enable them to do so with full effect. The satire, the epigram, the ridicule even, which the reformer of a generation ago had to use in order to shake men's minds out of the inertia of tradition, are no longer required. Rancour has departed from the discussion of religious dogmas, and remains only in the political and financial discussions of the various religious sects.

But the greatest power of all has been the spread of knowledge. What eighteenth-century Rationalism, with all its genius, failed to do, has been accomplished by discoveries in geology, researches in biology and psychology, and by the study of the origins and history of the Christian and other religions. These researches not only contradicted the world-scheme which underlay the supernatural beliefs of Christianity, but at the same time they afforded the firm foundations for an alternative faith. Not only did they disprove the orthodox creeds by explaining their pedigree, but they passed beyond the negative position to the point of supplying positive opinions on matters formerly supposed to be the special province of religious intuition and dogma.

It is doubtful whether the public

appreciates the constructive as well as the destructive side of modern scientific knowledge in relation to religion. Certainly the mass of *Daily Telegraph* correspondents seem to be unaware that the advance of knowledge has done anything more than supply new arguments for "unbelief," as contrasted with "belief." I hope to show later that there are reasons for contending that genuine *belief* belongs to the scientific view of life alone, and that the various dogmatic theological views which are offered as alternatives are more properly to be considered as embodying the negation of true belief.

But for the present the point to be considered is that science has provided a double weapon against the orthodox creeds, in respect of which the question, "Do we Believe?" is asked. Not

only has it undermined and destroyed the citadel of dogma, but it has built in its place an edifice based on knowledge and designed according to the dictates of the highest human reason. The direct attack and the indirect competition, if one may use the word, have thrown the old faith so completely on its defence that the anxiety of Christian apostles to prove their faith is even greater than the willingness of Rationalists to demonstrate that the Christian faith is false, and that the other kind of faith is far better. Consequently, we have the extraordinary result that from within the churches themselves comes the cry: "Do we Believe?" To return to the statement with which we set out, there would be no need to ask the question if the answer were in the affirmative.

CHAPTER III.

THE OPENING LETTER: DOCTRINE AND ETHICS

PARTICULAR attention is demanded by the opening letter by *Oxoniensis*, because it was responsible in great measure for the lines which the discussion followed.

The ostensible occasion of the inquiry, "Do we Believe?" was the approaching meeting of the Church Congress. According to *Oxoniensis*, the fatal defect which marred the value of the Congress was that it took too much for granted. "It starts from a platform which is not universally accepted. It chatters about details when the very ground-plan is not

settled. The assumption on which it proceeds is that we all believe, and that we are all Christians. But do we believe? And if so, what? Are we Christians? And if so, in what sense of that ambiguous term? This is the preliminary question, the problem of all problems, which troubles many sensitive and thoughtful students, who look on the world as it is, and contrast it with the world as the divines complacently regard it."

In answering the question in the negative *Oxoniensis* does so from two

points of view: that of doctrine and that of ethics. He does not touch upon the dogmas with which Christianity tries to explain the ultimate mysteries of the Cosmos, but he deals with a typical doctrine common to all shades of Christian belief: the doctrine of a future life for which this earthly existence is a preparation.

"Do we act," he asked, "as if we believed that this world was a preparation for the next? Is the prevalent cast of our minds one in which the present is tinged with the mystery of the future? . . . If the world is ruled by justice which is to realise itself elsewhere, there must be some form of future punishment or retribution, just as there must be some form of reward and recompense. . . . Do we believe it? . . . Faith without works is dead. Where are the works which show that we believe in Heaven and Hell—in another world at all? It is no good to dismiss these as old and familiar questions. Have they ever been answered?"

The question, it will be seen, is put in a practical form which admits of no speculative evasion. That fact will account to some extent for the wide interest which the ordinary reader took in it. Had he been asked if he believed in the immortality of the soul, he would have left the answer in the hands of the clergy; being asked if he believed in Heaven and Hell, and organised his life in view of his eternal habitation of one or the other, he was startled out of his usual lethargy.

But although the question was put in this straightforward fashion, the vast majority of the correspondents did not attempt to give it a straightforward answer.

One of the striking features of these spontaneous confessions of faith is that they deal only half-heartedly with the question of a future life. In a minority of cases only do we find an expression of opinion regarding the probable conditions of immortal existence. What the correspondents feel far more concerned about are the uses of Christianity in relation to human conduct on this side of the grave, and, more particularly, the beneficial effects on earthly happiness of the belief in Providence. As we shall see later, the consolation afforded by belief in God is referred to with exceptional frequency in the letters; and while the consolation has certainly some reference to the promises of rest and happiness in Heaven, the thing that appeals most of all is the immediate effect of belief in making earthly life more enjoyable.

This is quite natural, since a present feeling is always more impressive than the prospect of a future one. Nevertheless, the attitude now taken up is in glaring contrast to that which was typical of the past ages of religious faith. If the reader turns from a study of these letters to almost any one of the religious books which were the pride of former generations of fervent religious faith, he cannot but be struck by the "worldism" of the later and the "other-worldism" of the earlier expressions of belief. It is not so much that the present-day believer is selfish (he is strong on the ethics of self-sacrifice) as that the centre of religious interest has moved from behind the veil of death and settled in the midst of this earthly life itself.

Here we have a conspicuous example of how the spirit of Rationalism has permeated modern thought unknown to the thinker. Rationalism knows nothing

about the life beyond the grave ; it does not even find any proofs that there is such a life ; and its tendency is to concentrate the thoughts and energies of man on the improvement of his present state, on the encouragement of the evolution which has raised him from the brute to human dignity and is carrying him forward to higher capabilities than he has yet realised in the mass. Rationalism, in other words, is a secular principle ; and to the extent that the contributors to the "Do we Believe?" controversy lay emphasis on present earthly happiness and moral progress, to that extent are they Rationalistic.

Signs of this important change are by no means confined to what one might call the amateur ranks of Christian believers. The Church Congress, to which *Oxoniensis* referred, discussed many social problems—including such matters as secret commissions and gambling on the Stock Exchange—at almost greater length than purely church matters. The sermons of the day show us that the eyes of the preacher are not raised to the light of Heaven, but are bent upon the darkness of the earth. The homilies to which our fathers listened were almost wholly on such matters as predestination, the raptures of the blest, the sufferings of the damned, or on some knotty point of theological doctrine which had less bearing on human conduct than on the Newtonian hypothesis. Now these intricate searchings after other-worldly truth are out of date ; the volumes containing them are the cheapest of all in the second-hand shops where the wrecks of literature are cast up. The modern minister knows that if he wants to be listened to he must preach "live" sermons, which means that he must deal with some

mundane topic in which his congregation is practically interested. The sermon of to-day is not a sermon : it is a lecture.

That this is a change for the better will not be denied by those who appreciate the *nothing* we know of a future life and the *something* we have learned of the possibilities of the present life. It is surely better to cure the ills we know of than to tremble at those we know not of and are never likely to experience. Likewise, it is surely better to attempt the realisation of the highest human well-being on earth, when we know of no world beyond. And even those who do believe in the reality of the life to come seem to agree that the best preparation for it is the perfect life here and now.

The second ground on which *Oxoniensis* answers the question, "Do we Believe?" in the negative is that the ethics actually practised in modern life are contrary to those embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. All through the controversy this Sermon has played so conspicuous a part that one is forced to believe that it occupies a supreme position in the mind of the believer and is practically identified with Christianity itself. No Christian body, except perhaps the Quakers and some other smaller sects, ever tried to put its principles into action ; but it is claimed as the unique property of the Christian Church, and the one thing which the sceptic leaves untouched as he would an intrinsically sacred possession. It has been often said by clergymen themselves that the kernel of Christianity lies in the Sermon on the Mount.

If this is so, then the supernatural doctrines which were once alleged to be

foundations of Christian faith—the nation, the Miracles, the Resurrection, the Ascension—are only the husk. One must break to get at the real of religious life. For the Sermon on the Mount is a statement of purely ethical principles. It is a series of recommendations, and has nothing in common with the creeds and confessions of faith which have to be accepted by the Christian before he can enter the Kingdom.

I shall have something to say about similar confusions between natural and theological religion in the minds of professing believers; but this notice is referred to here as showing the problems of human conduct which monopolising the interest once concentrated on supernatural dogma. *Christians* makes a strong point of the fact that the shining lights of the Christian Church do the exact opposite of what the Sermon on the Mount asks them to do; they do not remain humble, they are not humble, they do not turn the other cheek to the smiter or forgive their enemies. On the basis of this contradiction he concludes that they are the people who follow them do not follow. Many of the correspondents refuse to agree with him; and the emphasis is given to this particular ethical contrast shows with added clearness how the supernatural or other-world element has been subdued in modern Christianity, and has been replaced by a moralism whose chief recommendation as an ideal seems, by the way, to be the impossibility of imperfect man ever coming to it.

This earnest concern for human nature is, as I have said, to be heartily commended as an advance towards the

Rationalist view of the main purpose of life. But if Christianity is to stand or fall by the Sermon on the Mount, it must give up all claims to distinction. Contrary to a very general but mistaken opinion, the ethical teaching attributed to Christ was not new. Religions far more ancient contain precepts of just the same character. The "golden rule" was preached long before the Christian Era. In other words, the claim of Christian ethics to be unique is not sound historically; the only reason why people consider the moral precepts of the New Testament to be its peculiar possession is that they are not equally familiar with the teachings of Buddha, Confucius, and other founders of earlier faiths. The "kernel" of the Christian faith is, therefore, a seed derived from a former tree. Intrinsically it is not less valuable on that account, but the fact cuts the ground from under the cherished belief that Christianity was the first religion to postulate what is accepted in many quarters as the highest ideal of human conduct.

Finally, the circumstance that the whole trend of the modern civilised world is counter to several of the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount gives birth to the suspicion that, after all, the ideals embodied in these precepts may not be defensible. If that can be proved—and many arguments in its favour can be found—then the last condition of a religion which makes the Sermon on the Mount its keystone is surely worse than the first. With its supernatural element withdrawn, and with its ethical principles proved to be either derived or unacceptable, what remains of the faith which was once delivered to the Saints?

CHAPTER IV.

THE PASSING OF THE BIBLE

WHAT remains?

Thirty or forty years ago a question striking so deeply at the foundations of the Christian faith would have been asked by only a small minority of people, and, when asked at all, would have been thought to be sufficiently answered by a reference to the authority of the Bible. People in search of a faith might differ on points of doctrinal detail, but they were generally at one in regarding the Bible as the impregnable rock on which to base their creeds.

Now all that is changed—changed so thoroughly that this voluminous correspondence would be different in no serious degree if all direct appeals to the Bible were deleted. From one point of view, this is the most conspicuous feature of the controversy. Here we have hundreds of people, in a professedly Christian country, discussing with openness the reality of the popular faith; and yet it is an exception for them to invoke the book in which that faith is embodied. No one, not even those who have taken the most superficial interest in this mass of spontaneous religious testimony, can have failed to be struck with this feature. So far, at least, as the correspondents are concerned, the supremacy of the Bible is at an end.

The absence of Bible references has struck some of the writers themselves. One of them says:—

Very few of your correspondents under the above heading have directed your

readers to the only real source of light upon the subjects discussed. The Bible claims to be written under the authorship of none other than the Holy Spirit of God, and, moreover, declares that the Divine Author is ever ready to enlighten those who come seeking for truth in dependence upon Him.

This view must strike many who are not Rationalists as being curiously “old-fashioned.” The traditional opinion is expressed even more fervently in the following extract:—

I have followed your correspondence with deep interest, and, at times, much pain—pain in reading letter after letter of those who are seeking the truth, when the truth lies at their very doors, and they reject it. A Bible nowadays can be purchased for a few coppers, and that Bible teaches the only truth worth knowing as regards religion—that God is our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour, and the Holy Spirit our Guide and Comforter. I have proved it all true daily for years, like thousands of other Christians, by personal experience.

These are typical of the occasional protests made regarding the neglect of Bible authority. More rarely still do we find an outspoken statement of the kind of belief in the Bible which was common a short generation ago. “I am one,” writes a correspondent, “of the insignificant minority who still cling to the ‘exploded theory’ of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures; a despised ‘Bibliolater,’ as the erudition of Canon Henson and others terms me. . . . I am senseless enough to believe the story of the Fall, to believe that Balaam’s ass spoke, that Daniel was cast into the den and remained undevoured, and to credit

implicitly all the many stories which the consensus of modern scholarship, forsooth, has pronounced pure allegory." In such utterances there is the bitterness of a stubborn defence of positions felt to be untenable. The writer stands by the old flag, his courage rising as he sees the other faithful defenders get fewer and fewer.

This momentous change is, like the change from supernatural dogma to ethical teaching with which it is closely identified, a triumph for Rationalism in the broadest sense. The injunction to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good is not to be obeyed by a mere appeal to any book whatever. The proving of all things involves the proving of the claims of inspiration which are made for the book itself. And the refusal to put the question of religious faith to the arbitrament of Gospel texts, and the determination to discover some basis of belief which will accord with the facts and conceptions familiar to cultivated reason, are clear signs that in reality it is reason and not dogma or authority that is the supreme judge in questions of faith. The Rationalist principle is not avowed, but it is acted upon to the extent of rejecting beliefs which do not agree with acquired knowledge.

The only difference between most of the people who are struggling to answer the question, "Do we Believe?" with a theological affirmative and those who are wholly naturalistic in thought is that relics of the once-accepted dogmas linger in the mental machinery of the former and hinder its proper action. Or we may picture them as digging for the germs of truth among the ruins of supernatural religions, instead of going to Nature herself and searching her illimitable stores.

In view of the manner in which the Bible is ignored by the great mass of disputants in this controversy, it seems hardly necessary to discuss the validity of the book from the Rationalist standpoint. The jury in this case seems to have set the Bible aside as *ultra vires*. It is interesting, however, to trace briefly how a book which was once regarded so widely as the sole embodiment of God's will is now neglected in a popular discussion of religious faith. How has it come about that, whereas Sir Oliver Lodge and Lord Kelvin are referred to with obsequious respect, the authority of St. Paul is hardly even remembered?

Here, again, destructive and constructive forces have both been at work. The destructive elements were first in the field, for until the days of Lyell and Darwin natural science had hardly reached the stage at which its views of the constitution of the universe were definite and strong enough to cast doubt upon the Book of Genesis and the truth of miracles. The scepticism of the eighteenth century was more philosophical, more general, than critical of Biblical details; nevertheless, as Paine's *Age of Reason* shows, the minds of a hundred years ago were quite capable of discovering flaws in the Bible which appeared fatal to all but the awe-stricken intellect. What Paine wrote then lives still to-day as a substantially true analysis of the Bible undertaken in a reverent search for truth; and in many a Christian church to-day the voice of the preacher echoes, unwittingly, the tones of the great Rationalist. But a century is a long time for an intelligent world to take to admit plain facts plainly stated; and in the slowness of the process we see the effect of the refusal to subject religion to the process of investigation

and discussion which it is now receiving on all sides.

If the destructive forces had been alone at work, the change from superstitious acceptance to rational study would certainly have been more slow. It was one thing to cast doubt upon the source of the inspiration of Genesis; it was another to prove that the statements therein were hopelessly at variance with the clearest teachings of ascertained fact. It was one thing to doubt the evidence of the New Testament miracles; it was quite another to show how the operation of natural law could be widened until it included every phenomenon known to mankind.

The best way to kill error is not to strike it down, or even to try to uproot it, but simply to plant truth in its place. A mind filled with the knowledge of the formation of the world which Lyell's geology afforded, with the conceptions of animal and human life revealed by Darwin and Haeckel, and, above all, a mind acquainted with the evolutionary view of the universe associated with the name of Spencer, could no more assimilate the cosmogony and supernaturalism of the Bible than a grown man could assimilate the fantasies of a child.

The Churches saw this clearly, and they opposed the spread of science with all their great strength. But it was of no avail. The conquest has been so complete that the Church is now trying, with almost pathetic earnestness, to prove that Science is its obliging ally or assistant teacher, and not a victor over supernatural philosophy.

As far as the Bible itself is concerned, the worst that destructive critics have said to prove its futility as an absolute

guide is now being preached by deans and curates. This is a bitter thing for some of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondents; and some, on the other hand, maintain that the current unbelief is due to the continued adherence of the clergy to doctrines now generally discredited among educated men.

These contrasted opinions, which are typically expressed by the two following extracts, are interesting as showing the unsettling effect which the chaotic doctrines preached from modern pulpits have on the minds of men searching for definite ideas. The very number of Christian sects compels discussion of their respective merits, and the variety of doctrines recommended by the ministers of each sect is an added stimulus to critical thought:—

First Extract.

In my humble opinion, it is the clergy and their insistence on faith and belief in dogmatic foundations that constitute the chief obstacles to a simple and universal belief in the moral principles laid down by many great teachers of morality, chief of whom was Jesus Christ. Clergymen, I daresay, would be unwilling to describe themselves as hypocrites; yet they continue Sunday after Sunday allowing their congregations to believe that in their opinion the origin of the world and all therein is exactly what is described in the Book of Genesis as having occurred about 6,000 years ago. I am convinced that if the clergy were to face this subject honestly, and allow the less highly-educated members of their congregations to realise that the story of the disobedience of Adam and the consequent fall of man was wholly of a legendary character, and not a specifically sinful act incurring the wrath of an avenging Deity, there would be infinitely less difficulty in bringing about a rational and pious belief in a loving God, who never contemplated dooming nearly the whole of mankind, except a select few, to eternal punishment.

Second Extract.

I was brought up to believe, and was very much shocked when my beliefs were called in question. But the Church has made me ask what it is I do believe. Last year the Bishop of Wakefield, speaking at Leeds, said, "The Bible is not infallible," "The Bible is not necessarily literal and exact," "It is not a scientific text-book," "The old chronology was not inspired," "The dates in the ordinary Bible are no guides to the dates of the books," and "The world was not created 4,004 years before Christ."

This year Canon Cheyne, speaking at the Churchmen's Union at Westminster, said that "it could be easily shown that some of the narratives in the Old Testament were coloured by Oriental mythology. The earlier chapters of Genesis contained the cosmogony and the deluge, and such stories as Jonah in the big fish were semi-mythical and Oriental in origin, showing the influence of Babylonia."

Those statements are calculated to shake the alleged belief of men like myself, who have but limited time for Bible study. Most of your correspondents appear to me to be blaming the scientific people for shaking our faith; but when the Bishop of Wakefield and Canon Cheyne are still members of the Church, what are we poor laymen to believe?

From these letters, and from other unmistakable signs, it is clear that the Church is itself contributing to the cause of Rationalism, both by its adherence to old ideas and by its promulgation of the new. A minister, it seems, is bound to make the wrong kind of convert either way. Many of them get out of the dilemma by turning to other foundations and supports of faith than are found in the text of the Bible; they devote their attention, for instance, to ethical considerations; and should they treat of the validity of the once Holy Book, they do so on a high philosophical plane, softening the asperities of destructive blows and trying to demonstrate that after root, trunk, and

branch have been removed the essentials of the Bible remain untouched.

Nevertheless, the more devout must see upon the covers of that once all-powerful book the fatal word *Ichabod*. As a human document, as a record of early history, of the working of primitive passions, lofty aspirations, warlike ambitions and hopes of peace in universal loving-kindness, it has a value which the critical scholar was the first to realise in the proper degree. But as a final, compelling authority over the minds of man, the answers to "Do we Believe?" show how humble is the position it holds. The corner-stone is now the stone despised of the builders.

Graphic expression has been given to this fundamental change in opinion regarding the Bible and its associated dogmas by Mr. Hamish Hendry in a poem entitled, "The Beadle's Lament."¹ The beadle, or minister's man, is lamenting the coming of a new minister and new doctrines:—

A braw new Bible has been bocht,
Revised, to clink wi' Modern Thocht;
A braw new beadle has been socht,
Soople and snod;
And this new Herd, himsel' has wrocht
A braw new God!

A God wha wadna fricht the craws;
A God wha never lifts the taws;
Wha never heard o' Moses' laws,
On stane or paper;
A kind o' throwless Great First Cause,
Skinklin' thro' vapour.

As for the Bible, if you please,
He thinks it's true—in twa degrees;
Some pairt is chalk, some pairt is cheese;
But he'll engage
To riddle oot the biggest lees
Frae ilka page.

¹ *Burns from Heaven; with Some Other Poems.* By Hamish Hendry. (London: Grant Richards.)

Oh ! for the days when sinners shook
 Aneth the true Herd's righteous crook ;
 When men were telt that this auld Book
 Is God's ain word ;
 When texts were stanes waled frae the brook,
 And prayer a sword.

My day is dune ; and richt or wrang
 The thocht comes like a waefu' sang ;

This Book and me, we've traivelled lang
 The poopit stair ;
 But that's a gate we twa shall gang
 Nae mair, nae mair !

The great virtue of the poetry lies in the fact that the reader, whoever he may be, sympathises more with the old beadle than with the apostle of emasculated doctrines.

CHAPTER V.

RATIONALISM IN THE CHURCHES

It is inevitable that the dethronement of the Bible from its once autocratic position should result in chaos and uncertainty among the clergy and the laity alike.

In the pulpit itself we have innumerable shades of belief, ranging from an approach to Rationalism up to a survival of the old dogmatism which used to gain such strength from the confident belief in the Bible. The public, failing to receive a definite message from their spiritual advisers, become discontented with them and blame the Churches themselves for weakness in the face of increasing unbelief.

Both these phenomena—the confused position of the clergy and the dissatisfaction of the laity with the teaching of the Churches—are clearly expressed in the *Daily Telegraph* correspondence.

A Scotch professor once told his students that if, in after life, they ventured to teach at all, they should teach with the authority of an archangel, or they would fail. That was how the Church taught in the days of its power,

but now, as we can see from the clergymen's letters to the *Daily Telegraph* and from sermons preached on the discussion, the Church has abandoned authority for apologetics. To give reasons for a dogmatic belief is far more difficult than to preach the belief as a simple duty ; and many a minister must regret the days when "texts were stanes waled from the brook, and prayer a sword." It is also far less effective in the case of supernatural dogmas, which are not susceptible to scientific proof. The clergy themselves are aware of this ; they feel their power to proselytise waning, while they themselves are baffled by the misgivings which the Rationalistic tendencies of the age are forcing upon their own minds.

One example, supplied from a high ecclesiastical quarter, will serve to show the dilemma in which the Church is placed by its partial acceptance of Rationalism. While the *Daily Telegraph* controversy was proceeding the Dean of Westminster delivered what the newspapers called a "remarkable

address" on the Bible to the Church Sunday School Institute.

After remarking upon how the attitude of men towards the Bible had changed, and how the stories once accepted as literally true were now regarded as allegories or parables containing spiritual lessons, he said that "for ourselves" this point of view is not perhaps very difficult, "but when we come to teach it is not easy. For quite young children there is very little difficulty, for stories are the natural vehicles to them of moral lessons, and they do not venture to ask if it is true or did it really happen."

In other words, to paraphrase the Dean's idea, it is easy to teach the Bible to minds incapable of reasoning. "But older children," he continued, "want to know; and we must be prepared to give them an honest answer." And the "honest answer" is that the stories which Church critics themselves admit were the crude folk-lore of a partially civilised people are to be regarded as "parables with a heavenly meaning." Thus, when Adam says, "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," the underlying spiritual truth is that "through holy matrimony man and woman become intimately one in a union which God has made, and which man must not break."

But although the Dean, in his anxiety to discover the handwriting of God in these old legends, is prepared to stretch a point to such almost ludicrous lengths, he is still obliged to admit that there are many more and many greater difficulties in connection with the Old Testament and the New Testament. "Even our learned theologians," he adds, "are not clear about a good many. The Bible is a much more wonderful book than we have sometimes thought. Much of it

is plain and stands out, but much is difficult of interpretation."

Now, if the teachers themselves are puzzled over what they once claimed to be the plain word of God—so plain that even the untutored savage was expected to understand its message—it is obvious that the pupils will not be very much impressed with the "interpretations" which are put before them with diffidence and with qualifications. If the revelation of God to man is a mystery to be painfully unravelled, then it ceases to be a revelation. If each man may read into the Bible such meanings as he may think appropriate, then it is the man and not the book that is the authority.

Thus we come to have as many doctrines as there are clergymen, as many kinds of Christianity as there are pulpits. No wonder, then, that the anxious inquirer turns away from the Churches unsatisfied. Here is a typical expression of the discontent which this dogmatic chaos has brought about:—

I am of opinion that belief in the teaching of the Church has largely decayed of recent years, and that this is, to a great extent, the fault of the Church (using that term in a wide sense) itself. Unless the teacher is absolutely convinced of the truth of his message, he is not likely to bring conviction to his hearers. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?" Now, it must be confessed that the Churches of this country have certainly been giving a very uncertain sound. In many places there has been no clear and definite testimony to the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ Himself had been reduced to an abstraction, and doubts have been thrown upon the inspiration of the Scriptures, which, it has been affirmed, are discredited by modern science. I submit, therefore, that the cause of much of the present unbelief is: (1) the weakening of their doctrinal position by the Churches themselves, and (2) the lack of simplicity in Christian worship.

Another typical extract will show how the babel of the Churches confuses the mind in search of a definite religious message :—

We go to church, not to one, but to many, in the vain search for a religion which will satisfy us, but in vain, for at one church we are required to believe implicitly in things which are contradicted at the next. Even supposing that we could order our lives as the Sermon on the Mount (which, after all, is an ethical code) requires, we should not then be "Christians," as the word is accepted, if we were unable to believe in certain creeds which our reason forbids.

On the other hand, if the Churches shut their eyes to the spread of Rationalism which is producing the numerous differences of personal opinion about what religious doctrines do or do not survive the ordeal of modern criticism, they are in no better position. The old dogmas are quite as unpalatable to present-day congregations as the various forms of emasculated Christianity are confusing. That any return to the old authoritative doctrines is impossible, the following extracts from the *Daily Telegraph* correspondence will make fairly clear :—

It is my humble opinion that the reason the Churches are comparatively empty nowadays is, not because people do not believe in a God and a universal Saviour, but because of the narrowness of the beliefs of the various Christian sects. Women attend places of worship as a matter of course, but men will not go and listen to what, I fear, in a great number of instances is "rubbish." How can you expect a man to attend a chapel where he is taught that, unless he believes "Christ died to take away the punishment of his sins," he is lost? and will any reasonable man believe that frequent attendance at the Holy Communion is the sum-total of religion?

If Christianity is to be ever more than a splendidly unattainable ideal, our Churches must surely reorganise their methods, and *our divines, instead of discussing abstractions and reciting old formulæ, which are*

consistently ignored out of church, must contrive to bring religion into closer touch with the social and economical conditions under which we live. There will be many arrears to work off, but that there is abundant need for a new and a larger pronouncement will be testified by all who are acquainted with the inner working of the commercial conscience.

Sometimes the discontent with the Churches takes another form. One correspondent complains that they are not making a serious effort to oppose the rising tide of Rationalism. "It is singular to remark," he says, "that while the modern world is ceasing to believe in the Churches, the Churches have never yet been effectually stirred up for the work of stopping the rot. Yet their main business lies, not with the people who are bad, but with the people who are perplexed."

This is practically an accusation that the Churches themselves are indifferent to the effect which Rationalism is having on their dogmas. If the accusation be just—and to some extent, apparently, it is—the explanation is that a large number of clergymen are themselves Rationalists at heart. There is no lack of external evidence of this striking fact. The secessions from the ranks of the Church afford some cases in point. Those who are associated with Rationalist organisations frequently receive letters from clergymen expressing complete sympathy with the aims and principles of Rationalism, but deploring the reasons which compel them to remain in the Church. Sometimes they shrink from making a rupture with associations and friends of many years' standing; sometimes it is their affection for those nearest and dearest to them which restrains them from giving pain by a recantation of faith; but most often the main cause is an economic one.

There are few men more helpless in this world than a clergyman without a benefice. The training which fitted him for the Church usually unfits him for any other profession. The whimsical story told of the clergyman who had thirteen solid reasons for not leaving the Church in spite of his disbelief—the reasons being his wife and twelve children—is typical of many of the situations, tragical enough in many cases, of numerous clergymen of all denominations. It is hard for any man to face destitution for conscience' sake, and when those dependent upon him would be involved in the same hardship, it is not to be wondered at that the majority of Rationalistic parsons choose to remain in their churches and find a partial solace in preaching sermons which are mainly ethical in tone, and are as enlightened as the compulsory darkness of the Church will allow.

One minister who took part in the "Do we Believe?" controversy goes so far as to believe that in time the Church will reconstruct itself on the lines suggested by modern thought. His letter, which is signed "Anglican Priest," is worth quoting at some length for the light it throws on the attitude of what is certainly a large section of the clergy:—

In our baptismal services I am compelled to pray, "Almighty and everlasting God, who of Thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water"—this in the face of the fact that so moderate a critical spirit as that which pervades Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* nevertheless informs us that "in the light of scientific and historical criticism it (the Flood) must be frankly recognised as one of the many stories or legends which are found in the folk-lore and early literature of all peoples."

In our most sacred and central act of worship, the Holy Communion, I am com-

pelled to tell my people authoritatively from the altar that they ought to keep holy the Jewish Sabbath, because God made the world in six days and rested on the Sabbath. This in face of the fact that I have probably lectured the day before in my parish hall on some subject which necessitates a belief in the fact that the world is tens of thousands of years old—i.e., geology, ethnology, etc. Further, having at morning celebration told my flock to keep holy the Sabbath, I tell them in my sermon at matins to keep holy the Christian Sunday, because Jesus rose from the grave!

We are handcuffed, Sir, tied and bound hand and foot with formularies, which as educated men we can no longer believe. Will reconstruction never come? Will bishops and congresses never move in these, the really vital matters? My theology grows less; my religion, I hope, greater. Indeed, it is my religion which has prompted me to make this confession of belief in a spiritual world in the hope that, as poor Thomson wrote:

Here and there some weary wanderer
In that same city of tremendous night,
Will understand the speech and feel a stir
Of fellowship in all disastrous fight.

I suffer mute and lonely, yet another
Uplifts his voice to let me know a brother
Travels the same wild paths, though out of sight.

It is very doubtful, however, if bishops and congresses will ever move in such really vital matters as Church reconstruction on the drastic lines suggested. The Rationalism that has permeated clerical circles is not Rationalism as an avowed principle or mode of thought; it is Rationalism in the guise of "reverent criticism," and is often limited to the dogmas not considered "essential."

Here we find again the subtle influence of the economic factor. The churches form a vast organisation of great wealth and great (if diminishing) prestige. So long as they hold out the opportunity of a competence and of social advancement, so long will they find apostles ready to do their will. This is not a cynical view of the situation. It is

merely a plain fact. The difficulty of filling the pew is likely to be much more formidable than that of filling the pulpit so long as the pulpit is endowed.

It may be said that there is an increasing difficulty in obtaining curates for the Church of England. That is so; but the real cause appears to be that this section of the Christian fold is the only one in which the Christian ideal of poverty is properly enforced. And a very robust faith is required to look forward to life on a curate's stipend. Nevertheless, it may be freely admitted that the economic factor is not all-powerful. It may secure an adequate supply of ministers, but it does not necessarily secure that they shall be of the best quality. One of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondents strikes a common note when he says that "Sermons in the immense majority of cases are not good, but bad. They ought to fill the churches. They do a good deal to empty the churches. It is the rarest thing in the world to hear a pulpit deliverance which seems to an educated mind to touch the root of the matter. What the Churches have to grapple with is the problem of getting themselves listened to, and if that is to be done they will have to bring to bear upon the task a higher order of powers, and a much more penetrating philosophy."

Alongside this we may put the fact that the average man has by no means a high opinion of the intellectual powers of the average minister.

The level of capacity seems to be far higher in legal, medical, and political spheres than in the Church. For an explanation of this we need go no further than the universities, where *young men receive the general educa-*

tion which is a preliminary to special studies for theological pursuits. There it is a common saying that a man who gets into the prize list never goes into the Church. It is not so much that his keener intellect sees the fallacies of Church teaching as that, when he feels his mental power developing, the secular professions seem to offer greater scope for the exercise of his abilities. I know one case of a man who was a "believer" (and still is), who abandoned a Church career because the teaching in the Scotch theological colleges was, as he described it, "fit only for school-boys." This may be an extravagant description, but the fact is undeniable that as time goes on the Church becomes less and less attractive to the most promising minds of the rising generation.

And if we consider the position of Church dignitaries of the present day, and compare it with that of the leading lights of the days of undisturbed faith, the contrast is surely striking. We see a certain amount of distinguished competence, but of great talent or genius the ranks of ecclesiastics seem to be empty. Never was the Church more in need of commanding intellects than at the present day; and never were they more difficult to discover. From every Christian denomination there has come an appeal, more and more insistent, for an effective "counterblast" to the publications of the Rationalist Press Association. So far, that appeal has been made in vain. The Churches, with their almost illimitable wealth, and with their numerous subsidised organisations for the propagation of supernatural religion, have produced only a few volumes, which have had only a fraction of the effect produced on the public mind by the productions of an Association whose

resources are comparatively infinitesimal.

In this connection the story of David and Goliath has a spiritual meaning, which even the Dean of Westminster might not suspect. A giant fettered with the armour of tradition and overconfident of its invulnerability is no match for a David armed with the simple weapons of truth.

The increasing amount of attention given to ritual in Church services is a clear sign of their diminished power over the minds of men. The incense, the solemn ceremonial, the elaborate music, are all appeals to the senses which have little in common either with the teaching of Christ or the social spirit of the day. There is no mere coincidence in the fact that the days of real religious fervour were the days of simple forms of worship. A living impulse requires no extraneous assistance in appealing to the hearts of men, but a dead or dying dogma requires all the arts of stage management to make it attractive. One of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondents makes a strong protest against the development of ornate services which are apparently as unpalatable to the fervent believer as they are to the Rationalist:—

Public worship is a Christian duty without a doubt, but when we consider the amount of time now devoted to the singing of elaborate anthems, organ recitals, and other displays in our churches, there is but little time left for the sincere and silent worshipper. These displays may be attractive to the youthful and flippant, but to those who have topped the hill and "fixed their heads for home" 'tis but a poor solace, and satisfieth not the empty soul. I write with all respect for honest effort to do good, but I would humbly ask our ministers of religion, particularly those of the Established Church, whether there is not far too much striving after effect in what we term

"worship" to-day. We speak of our Church "services," but it seems to me the name is wrongly applied to-day, for they do not savour of "service" to our Creator, but rather "entertainment" to ourselves, the creatures, and I for one am constrained to think sometimes that the beautiful prayers, handed down to us for generations, now appear to be inserted in the service as a sort of apology.

The power of the Church, in short, has waned with that of the Bible, on whose teaching it was founded. When the decay of ecclesiastical influence has proceeded some way further, the Church will have become, like the Bible stories, an allegory for the spiritual edification of thoughtful men. What the ultimate fate of the Churches will be no man can say with certainty. Their efforts at adjustment to the growth of scientific knowledge have been carried so far that one might hope that in time the last traces of supernatural dogmas will disappear, and the Churches will be transformed into centres of moral culture and social activity. But the influence of their legacies and endowments will persist for many a long day yet, imposing restrictions on the evolution of the Ethical Church. The situation in Scotland between the old Free Church and the United Free Church shows—if that were needed—how powerful is the influence of financial means on the position of a Church. Powerful as it is, however, it has been powerless to oppose the development of rational thought on the deepest subjects, even among the clergy themselves.

The development of science and the spread of scientific knowledge have given rise to a movement which not all the permanently-endowed institutions in the world can stop. Some ministers speak of a reaction from the rise of Rationalism, but the pulpits themselves give evidence

that the evolution of trust in human reason as the sole guide of humanity is in reality proceeding unchecked. The exposition of scientific views of life, morality, and human destiny finds a wider and more appreciative audience than ever before, while the theology of the Churches is becoming more and more attenuated and apologetic.

As we have seen, the chaos in Church teaching, the effort to recommend the

theological outlook to sensible men, and the endeavour of some to force life into dogmas which the majority have abandoned as dead—these, and the accompanying decay of the intellectual power of the priesthood, are all revealed in the correspondence as forces which are unsettling the old beliefs in the minds of men and preparing the way for the growth of Rationalism.

CHAPTER VI.

FAITH BY INTUITION

Now that the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture has crumbled beneath the feet of the faithful, those who are still moved by the "will to believe" are casting round for other foundations of faith in God and a future life.

The *Daily Telegraph* correspondence reveals, not so much what the pulpits are saying on the matter, as what is now appealing to the average man as the valid basis of belief. It is typical of the confusion into which supernaturalism has been thrown that numbers of different reasons are given for the faith that is in the Christian of to-day. At the first reading of the correspondence, the discord of apologetics is rather confusing, but on careful analysis the reasons given separate themselves into fairly well-defined groups. Each of these will be discussed separately.

In the days of Bible supremacy men encouraged their souls with Bible doctrines. Now, when even the Dean

of Westminster confesses that the Bible contains a mass of difficulties which his life-time of study has not solved, the faith-seeking soul recoils from external supports and looks within itself for the springs of religious truth.

Thus has arisen a sect without a name—a sect which is gaining more and more adherents as the critical destruction of Biblical and Church History foundations proceeds through its final stages. They may best be called Intuitionists. It is upon what they call their intuitions that they build their faith in the supernatural world.

One typical expression of this type of belief comes appropriately from a woman:—

My reasons for believing are many, but the chief one is that I have "the witness in myself" of His presence, His power, His love, and divine help. I have personally proved the efficacy of prayer again and again. I do not shut my eyes to the difficult problems and questions which we

all encounter in this life, but I am persuaded that "all things work together for good," and that nothing can separate us from "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Another writer goes so far as to define intuitive belief, and to give what he regards as a striking example:—

By intuition I mean the power we have of instantly recognising the truth of a statement although incapable of any proof, and it is this power which is the divine portion of every human being—the soul itself, in fact. These intuitive acts constitute, in my opinion, true belief and true faith. As an example of my meaning, take that epigrammatic commandment of Christ's, "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." Instantly one's assent to it is given.

It is to be feared that the golden rule hardly belongs to the class of statements which are incapable of any proof. But the definition of intuitive belief is sound enough. There are many other correspondents who believe that they have a God-given touchstone which instantaneously, and with no effort of reasoning power, tells them what is and what is not true gold among the dogmas of religion. The distinction between this intuitive power and the intellect is explained in the following extract from another letter:—

The reason that people lose their faith is that they are trying to do with one-half the mind what can only be done with the other half. It is as though they overload the cart and starve the horse, and then wonder why they get nowhere. In other words, they over-develop the intellect. Religious faith, indeed, all faith, belongs to the intuitive mind, and if that is starved out of being faith vanishes also. All the greatest art of the world, the highest deeds and the noblest characters, have resulted from a fine balance of the intuitive and intellectual faculties. Intuition, in its highest manifestation, we term genius, and unbalanced by intellect it may degenerate into madness. Intellect, uninspired by intuition, is a mere machine. A man's intuitional stature may be gauged accurately

by his intellectual attitude towards the universe. It is a far cry from Huxley's checkmating angel to the image that arises in the mind of the Hebrew poet of the father pitying his own children. We have passed intellectually from a simple admission of the inability of the human will to control its own destiny to a recognition of its function of bringing the individual mind into conscious harmony with the unity of Nature. And if we hesitate to affirm intellectually the existence of a personal God it is because intellect can neither affirm nor deny, but must needs sit silent in the presence of a greater revelation.

Little imagination is needed to understand how comforting this belief in intuition must be to a mind anxious to retain the old beliefs in Providence and immortality, yet unable to accept the old proofs of these beliefs. Omar with his wine was not more proof against the intrusion of religious difficulties than is the Intuitionist with his idea that evidence and reason do not count in the determination of fundamental ideas. All questions of Biblical criticism, of scientific interpretations of the universe and of human life, all doubts as to miracles, immortality, and every claim of supernaturalism, vanish before the simple consciousness that in the soul of each man is a monitor whose decision is absolute and whose authority is unquestionable. Science and its sister, Logic, as we are told, sit silent in the presence of a greater revelation. And the greater the revelations of science the greater, obviously, the revelation that surpasses them all!

This point of view must be discussed with some approach to thoroughness, since it is already very popular, and is likely to become more and more popular among people who are unacquainted with science save indirectly in its negative influence on supernaturalism. As the external sources of faith dissolve away,

the stronger will the appeal to the internal source become. We are, therefore, likely to hear more and more about the "still small voice" which confirms the beliefs which men are anxious to retain.

In the first place, the very fact that intuitional belief is comforting leads the independent mind to suspect it. We shall see later how ready people are to think that because certain faith is consoling, therefore it is the one to be accepted as true. Fortunately or unfortunately, truth is under no obligation to be consoling. But people, in their moral weakness, desire that it should be so; and in this desire they are apt to accept as true that which is only consoling. The inference is, of course, unsound, just as would be the inference that a drug which eases pain is proper for the bodily system in its normal condition. But it is one that is often made, especially by people who are in search of a faith that will satisfy their temperament first and their intellect second.

The objections to intuitions are, however, not limited merely to the superficial one of suspicion. They may be summarised as follows: first, that many people who are willing to believe do not have these intuitions; second, that intuitions do not give the same message to everybody; and, thirdly, that there are no such things.

The third objection, of course, underlies and explains the other two. It may seem dogmatic to assert that the intuitions which so many people think they possess do not exist, but the assertion is based on the fact that the evolution of these intuitions can be traced back to purely natural origins. If, as many Churchmen say, "we are all evolutionists nowadays," the believer in intuitions *must be prepared to see his most sacred*

promptings traced back to the ideas of the untutored savage.

It is claimed, for instance, that people have an intuition of the existence of God and of the reality of a future life. The proposition, "There is a God," is accepted automatically, it is said, because it is known intuitively to be true. But, apart from the fact that an increasing number of educated people enjoy no such intuition, it is possible, as Spencer and many other writers have shown, to trace the modern refined idea of God back through various stages of development to the conception of a dual life entertained by primitive man.

The idea of God and of immortality as well seems to have originated in the notions suggested by shadows and reflections, by the phenomena of swoons and trances, and, above all, by dreams of departed ancestors and relations. These dreams were interpreted by the savage as visits of ghosts or doubles from the shadow-world; and from that germ rose the rites of propitiation and worship of ancestors, the belief of polytheism, and thence (as the Old Testament shows) the faith of monotheism.

It would be superfluous to trace in detail the growth of these two ideas, which are now cherished as the intuitive evidences of the existence of God and His promise of immortality. Anyone who doubts that these ideas have had a purely natural origin may have his doubts set at rest by a careful reading of Spencer, Grant Allen, Tylor, Frazer, Edward Clodd, and many other students of early religions. Given a natural source and the natural development of primitive ideas through innumerable generations, it is easy to understand that ideas which have persisted so long in one form or another

have now become almost part of the mental structure of man.

The proofs of that natural evolution are so incontrovertible that a very heavy *onus probandi* rests upon every one who asserts that God implanted a knowledge of himself and his heaven in the minds of men. If a phenomenon can be adequately explained by ordinary causes, it is unnecessary, to say the least, to drag in extraordinary causes. And just as anthropology is competent to show how the ideas of God and the future life arose, so is psychology competent to show how they became, through generations of persistence and through the influence of early religious education, regarded as intuitions. When the source of ideas is forgotten it is natural to assume that they were spontaneously created. The idea of evolution itself seems to be an inspiration, if one is ignorant of the long accumulation of evidence and the long process of thought which led up to its conception.

God and Immortality are, in fact, dogmas which lose their power when their pedigree is known.

An illuminative illustration of the same sort of thing is contained in Mr. Balfour's Presidential Address to the British Association in August, 1904, where the speaker made a daring attempt to prove that the modern conception of the fundamental unity of material nature was due to a transcendental source. He referred to the recent speculations which had led up to the idea that electricity and matter were identical, and that, consequently, all the various substances were simply different forms of the one elemental material.

The readiness with which these speculations had been accepted in scientific

circles was, Mr. Balfour thought, evidence that in the mind of man there had been implanted a conception of the unity of nature; and that, when scientific grounds for believing in that unity were afforded, they were eagerly welcomed as being in agreement with an intuitional conception.

To this plausible theory there is a convincing reply. During the nineteenth century the progress of science revealed a number of close inter-relations between substances and processes formerly considered as diverse. The chemical "elements" were arranged in associated groups, and the connection between organic and inorganic chemistry established; and the conservation of energy, the transformation of one form into an equivalent amount in another form—as heat into electricity, electricity into light, light into organic life—pointed directly to some fundamental unity in nature. The doctrine of evolution was, further, a unifying principle, indicating that things now distinguished from each other by important features might be traced to a common source. The whole trend of science was, in short, towards discovering a "common denominator" for the material universe.

Thus Mr. Balfour's mysterious intuition becomes merely the suggestion, partly sub-conscious, of the educated scientific mind. And all other intuitions, philosophical and religious, may be analysed in the same way. If psychology proves anything, it proves that the mind of the infant is a mere mechanism for the receipt and storage of impressions, and for the production of reflex actions as a result of these impressions. There are no sources of knowledge beyond the five senses; or, at least, anyone who claims that there

are must bring proof through the medium of these senses.

Here we return to the first and second objections to intuitional belief; that everybody does not possess these intuitions, and that intuitions do not carry the same message to every individual.

The universality of an intuition would not prove its validity; the mere fact that everybody felt, in their inmost hearts, that they were immortal, and that God had created them, would not constitute proof, since it offers no evidence regarding either subject. A universal mistake is as possible as a universally correct idea. But the crowning misfortune for the intuitionist is that his intuitions are not shared by everybody. What is the good, one may ask bluntly, of another man saying that there is a "consciousness within him," an "indefinable something" which tells him that God lives and that he himself will live for ever, when the man he is addressing has no similar promptings?

One hears very often that the belief in God is universal, but if that were so, how is it that one and the same heaven-planted seed produces a belief in ancestor-worship among the savages, in racial monotheism among the Jews, in the Trinity among the Christians, and in all the countless variations of God-ideas among Buddhists, Hindus, Parsees, Confucians, Mohammedans, and all the other religious sects? The extraordinary diversity regarding the fundamentals of religion, and their absolute rejection by an increasing number of people, show that, even if the intuition were there originally, it must have been modified almost beyond recognition by the influence of education and environment. But the essence of intuition is its com-

plete independence of rational influences. It is supposed to be a clear, unequivocal voice; yet it produces Buddhists in Burmah, Mohammedans in Turkey, ikon-worshippers in Russia, Christians in Europe, and fetish-worshippers in Africa. One might almost say that it produces agnostics in the family of a Rationalist.

The appeal to intuition would, as I have said, be useless in the case of a man to whom the idea of such an intuition did not appeal. Therefore, it is doubtful whether the intuitionist will find much support save among those who are already willing and ready to "believe." I put *believe* in inverted commas, because a belief which is accepted without adequate evidence is not properly entitled to rank as a belief. It is at worst a superstition, and at best a hypothesis. But if men who fancy they are drowning clutch at straws as fiercely as those who are actually in danger, those who think that Rationalism is a negation of all belief will be as anxious to retain any vestiges of the old faith as if they really were the last remnants of all faith. Consequently the best way to prove the uselessness of intuition is not so much to reveal its pedigree and its hopeless vagaries as to allow the mind to assimilate the knowledge on which reason may build a new edifice of belief.

Here again we see that critical efforts, though conclusive to minds which are open to conviction, can be evaded by the "will to believe" in supernaturalism and the "will to disbelieve" in the plain teachings of ascertained fact. We must create and encourage the habit of constructive scientific thought before we can expect people whose minds were once dogma-ridden to believe only when logical proof is afforded.

CHAPTER VII.

NATURE, SCIENCE, AND THE MIRACULOUS

WITH the Bible involved in a chaos of Church criticism, and with his once sacred intuitions revealed in their true light, the soul of the would-be believer turns to Nature for support.

At first sight it might seem curious that men should look to Nature for the foundations of belief in the supernatural. But the theory is, of course, that Nature is the finite manifestation of an infinite God. The visible world, we are told, bears the imprint of its Creator.

Familiar as this point of view is in most religious discussions, it is touched upon comparatively seldom in the "Do we Believe?" controversy. No one, so far as I can discover, quotes the hackneyed line—

"The undevout astronomer is mad."

But the usual sentiment is expressed by a minority of the correspondents in such passages as the following:—

If we look to Nature and all its known wonders and the new wonders which science is ever bringing before us, it is impossible, at least to myself, to say "there is no God."

Who can stand on the sea shore and witness the everlasting ebb and flow of the tides, or gaze at the firmament and take in as far as the finite mind can do the distances and movements there revealed, who can study botany, geology, chemistry, or physiology, or witness the succession of day and night, winter and summer, seed time and harvest, and not believe in the creating, directing, and maintaining power we call God?

In view of the fact that the correspondents themselves lay so little

stress upon the argument from Nature, it is almost superfluous to go over the reasons for believing it to be unsound. But it may be as well to indicate the line of reasoning.

The old doctrine of creation has been thoroughly discredited by the proofs of evolution—so thoroughly that from many pulpits one learns the theory of a First Cause which brought the universe into being at some incalculably remote period, and allowed it to work out its natural course with only, perhaps, occasional interferences which we call miracles.

But the assumption of a First Cause merely puts back the difficulty another step. The source of the First Cause is just as great a puzzle as the source of the universe itself; if the First Cause were indeed infinite and eternal (as it is always said to be), it must have included or been identical with the universe, since there is nothing in the infinite and eternal which did not always exist. When one starts to muse on the ultimate origin of things in this way, the solution of the puzzle seems to get further and further away the deeper one gets.

Taking the matter in its less abstract form, we find men claiming that the order, beauty, and ingenuity of nature reveal the work of God. But it is equally competent to claim that the disorder which is sometimes exhibited in nature—the shattered worlds, the anarchy of animal and vegetable life,

the ugliness of desert regions, the horrors of the struggle for existence, the bloodshed and death which one meets with everywhere in the higher ranks of creation, and the countless examples of miscarriage and waste are all evidences of a Creator whose attributes are the exact opposite of what the believer would have them be. And even the old argument from design, the famous "watch" argument of Paley, is abandoned as based on an unjustifiable inference.

The modern scientific conception of matter as containing the potentialities of all things, and as having existed eternally in ever-changing forms, cuts the ground away from the idea that natural operations and sequences imply a supernatural mechanic and controller.

The *Daily Telegraph* correspondence shows, however, that the argument from nature is taking a different and more subtle shape in the mind of the average believer.

The argument now is that the mysteries of nature, as indicated by scientific men, are no less wonderful than the miracles in which these scientific men decline to believe. The Bishop of London said on a recent occasion: "Is the day of Marconi's wireless telegraphy the day in which to say that things are impossible to God?" This argument is applied by the same authority to the Gospel miracles in the following ingenious way:—

The only objection to the feeding of the 5,000 is, that it is something which we do not see happen before our eyes to-day. So far, then, from being intellectually ashamed, I glory in the miracles. They lift me from the petty tyranny of the present, and remind me of the Great Arm ever at work behind what we call the law of Nature, for every

law of Nature requires a continual application of force. The miracle does not break any law of Nature, any more than a man's finger breaks a law of Nature when it saves a spider from drowning, but it brings in the action of the Great Will of the Universe, which we must suppose to be as free in its own world as it allows us to be in our smaller world.

In less abstract language many other correspondents express the same opinion. "Everything in nature fills us with wonder," writes one, "and the miraculous is everywhere apparent."

Another asks *Oxoniensis*, in reply to his question, "How can we believe in what we do not understand?" if he believes in that "mystery of mysteries, the attraction of gravitation," and other things which he cannot "understand." "The mysteries," he continues, "of a sensible New Testament Christianity are probably neither more numerous, nor more puzzling, than the mysteries now taught in the name of modern science."

It is difficult to refrain from admiring the astuteness with which science has thus been pressed into the service of the belief in the miraculous. Time was when miracles were, plainly and simply, interruptions by God of the ordinary course of things in order to impress the sense of His existence and His power upon the minds of men. But increasing doubt was cast upon the value of the evidence for Bible miracles, and science further discouraged the belief in supernatural interventions by bringing overwhelming inductive proof of the uniformity of nature. It did further service in the same direction by its investigations of illusions and hypnotism, and its study of the psychology of credulity. And it completed its attack on the old doctrines by creating a critical mental attitude which de-

ample proof of miraculous before accepting them as fit of belief. In other words, ulism, and not simple scepticism, t practically impossible for any scientific man to believe that s, in the old sense, had oc-

the tables are being turned, : has proceeded with its studies material universe. It has probed and deeper into the phenomena er, living and non-living, and has the frontiers of its generalisa- ider and wider. And because it scovered many unexpected and ful things, these wonders are, by ing of the plain meaning of a r word, dubbed "miracles." And e, on the other hand, it deals ienomena only and has nothing to out the *noumenon*, or the ultimate which underlies the universe as resses itself upon our senses, its c position is held up as a proof t has no better grounds than "itself for its interpretations and les.

is a curious medley of opinions. : one hand science is accused of ering miracles, and on the other accused of helpless ignorance. views are, of course, quite

re is nothing more miraculous say, Marconi's wireless tele- than there is about a steam- . Clerk-Maxwell and others d out, by higher mathematics, eory of electric waves in the Hertz proved their conclusions mentally; and Marconi put Hertz's nents on a commercial basis. rely a far cry from this process

of calculation, experiment and commercialism, to the feeding of the five thousand.

The Bishop's argument, when reduced to its elements, is simply that because Marconi has devised an instrument for producing electric waves (which are not dissimilar to those of light), and another instrument for detecting these waves as the eye does those of light, therefore all things are possible to God. The inference is absurd, even apart from the consideration that the existence of God is at least an open question.

The "miracles" of science are, in short, not miracles at all, but merely newly-discovered manifestations of the activity of matter.

As for the other point of view—that science is as ignorant as faith and the scientific man does not "understand" any more than the believer on faith—it is based on mere confusion. Science deals solely with phenomena, with evidence, with things that are susceptible of investigation and logical proof on the basis of that investigation. Beyond that it does not go, because beyond that is the realm of no evidence.

To this extent science is agnostic; it refuses to build where it has no facts for a foundation. Faith *does* build without that foundation, deliberately; it asserts things about the origin of matter, immortality, the triune Godhead, and so on, which are beyond the range of logical proof; but because science recognises its limitations it does not follow that religious speculations outside the limits are true, or that it is our duty to take on trust what we do not understand.

Our duty is, rather, to recognise that

we, with our minds as they are, cannot ever "understand" in the philosophical sense of discovering the ultimate reality underlying phenomena (if there be one),

and that what we think about that has less relation to useful truth than the matter of taste has to the three last motion.

CHAPTER VIII.

BELIEF AS AN ACT OF SUBMISSION

THESE considerations bring us directly to a point of view which finds frequent expression in the *Daily Telegraph* controversy.

While the Churches are trying to prove, in sermons, books, and lectures, that the logical foundations of their various forms of supernatural belief are sound, Christian apostles and disciples are telling us that faith is an act of mental submission. On the one hand the inquirer is told to search the Scriptures and prove all things; on the other he is told that he must place his whole truth implicitly in the guidance of religious authority.

The text, "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of God," is repeatedly used by the correspondents to illustrate the duty of faith. One writer complains that people will not humble their intellects to believe first, "trusting they will after be able to prove; but would rather prove first and then believe." "Christianity," he adds, naïvely enough, "never was proved or believed that way." Another correspondent explains that "faith is 'fides'—obedience, loyalty—an act of self-repressing will, not of mental gymnastics."

The following is also a typical tract:—

"Faith" means "taking anything on trust," and we Christians take God's promises "on trust," just because we find it "impossible" to explain or fathom His statements. My doctor sends me a medicine; I have not the least idea how the medicine acts on my liver, or my lungs, or my heart; but I take the medicine as restorative "on trust." I believe the doctor.

Although the Christian apologists of the day have, by the very fact of their apologetics, given up this position in practice, the idea that there is something admirable in submissive faith pervades a large section of the religious public. The dislike with which "blind belief" is widely regarded shows that people still think that the act of instantaneous belief has a certain intrinsic value.

If all forms of supernatural faith were uniform, if the teachings of faith were as nearly unanimous, say, as the opinions of the medical faculty, there might be something in the idea that passive acceptance of that faith was incumbent upon the religious mind.

Even then, however, there would be plenty of arguments—as readers

Hill's *On Liberty* will be aware—for stating the articles of inspired faith by the touchstone of reason. But, in view of the conflicting messages delivered in the name of faith, it is absolutely necessary to choose between them.

If you drug Reason and open all the doors of the soul to Faith, three hundred forms of Christian belief will enter, along with all the other supernatural religions of the world, and the result will immediately become the theatre of the most acrimonious form of discussion known to man. According to the principle of passive submission, you must entertain all of them, since the mind of man has surrendered and left everything to Faith. The picture of the parliament of religions, so graphically drawn by Volney in his *Ruins of Empire*, is a faint index to the chaos which would follow from the logical application of the principle of implicit belief.

As a matter of fact, most submissive believers accept the faith they have been brought up in, or which suits their own particular temperament. Just as in the case of belief by intuition, these reasons carry no conviction to people who have not the same environment and feelings. The Churches themselves recognise that the inquiring spirit of the age demands reasons for supernatural faith.

But the idea that somehow or other Faith in itself—the act of acceptance of dogmatic teaching—is commendable remains as a sort of undercurrent of religious teaching when it is not preached as a cardinal doctrine.

Against such an attitude a volume of arguments might be written. In every other department of thought men consider it their duty to gather evidence, sift it carefully, and deduce general laws

by logical treatment of the facts available. In religion alone—the most supreme and the most vital—he is urged to accept what he is told without question, even when he is told a hundred contradictory things.

Thus the word “belief,” or conviction, has been twisted from its proper meaning and has come to connote, not the final outcome of a long process of earnest thought, but a preliminary act which is the reverse of thought. Belief in the religious sense is therefore not belief at all; it is, rather, deliberate unbelief.

From this point of view Rationalists are the only believers. They are generally called unbelievers, because they deny the validity of the evidences for the Christian faith. But in doing so they are no more unbelievers than the Christians are in relation to Buddhism or any other religion.

Every type of belief implies a negation of other types, and anything like total *unbelief* or the abandonment of all forms of conviction is really unthinkable. Unfortunately, the necessity of vigorously attacking the old forms of supernatural dogma in order that the mind may be freed for the exercise of reason has given many people the idea that Rationalism is a purely negative principle.

In point of fact it is essentially a positive principle. It is best defined in the words adopted by the Rationalist Press Association, as “the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority.” Only the prevalence of those arbitrary assumptions has led to

the critical work of Rationalism being made so prominent. The definition shows that Rationalism is a constructive force, and that it embodies a positive ideal in the same spheres in which supernatural religion has hitherto claimed dominance. What Rationalism offers to the seeker after religious truth

is not merely the denial of the old faiths, but a principle of thought which builds on the basis of experience and a conception of human life and an ideal of human progress which lack no relation to the mind which realises them. Close they lie to the heart of truth.

CHAPTER IX.

BELIEF AS A CONSOLING INFLUENCE

MANY of the *Daily Telegraph* letters show, however, that it is not truth which is being sought, but some form of belief which will soothe and comfort. One correspondent after another shows that the question which agitates him is not "Is Christianity true?" but simply "Is Christianity comforting?"

The preponderance of letters embodying this point of view may be accidental, but it gives the impression that a vast number of believers base their faith simply on the consoling power of Christian doctrine amid the troubles of earthly life. The following extracts are good examples of dozens, perhaps hundreds, more:—

I am asked, in my misery, deep and protracted, "if I believe." Yea, verily, I do believe! No power on earth could have carried me through the storms that have beaten on my head, but "that anchor holds," and while I see suicide after suicide of strong men, I, an old woman, without a relative surviving, left to my fate by former friends of some forty years, yet have my feet on the "Rock of Ages," and feel an inward peace which nothing can destroy.

When I looked one day, more than years ago, to the cross of Christ, and One "who His own self bore our sins, His own body on the tree" (2 Pet. i. 18) my sorrow was turned into joy unutterable, and amidst the trials and difficulties of life I have ever had deep within me "peace of God which passeth all understanding." It is not a question of a creed, but of knowledge of a person, of a friend in heaven, to whose power in heaven and earth is given.

I venture to say man derives far more happiness—even in this life—by accepting the Scriptures and living according to them; by rejecting them; and if, when they prove fallacious (for, after all, the matter of faith), what has he lost? None. He has, in the meantime, led the wisest and the happier life, and if his faith in a true Christian, is not misplaced, his happiness is unspeakable.

Other letters of this class lay emphasis on the subject of death. "Faith," says one, "feeble as it is, sometimes, helps us, it is true, in this life, but, above all, it teaches us to die." Another says:—

I would venture to ask these letters if they discard the Holy Bible and dis-

sacrifice of Christ as an atonement, what certainty can they have as to future fate; when they are on the land of the spirit world, and life is away, how can they make the without apprehension and harassing? How different their final minutes is mortal scene to those of the other, who is as certain as it is possible of anything that each one of cruel lashes which his Saviour bore the vicarious punishment for his misdeeds; that by those stripes he himself was healed; and that a loving welcome realm of bliss is awaiting him.

One who has had any intimate experience of the sorrows of life can have a certain sympathy with those whose failing courage throws back on extraneous support in affliction. We pity, rather than scorn, the man who is driven by inability to the relief afforded by opium. The consideration emerges at once in this attempt to answer "Do we believe?" by descriptions of the consolatory power of Christianity. True as these descriptions may be, they do not tell the truth of Christianity.

One thought that Christ wiped out the sins of men by his death on the cross may be soothing to the man or a man struggling against temptation, but the soothing influence does not rest on that that event took place. A sufferer may be comforted with the thought of heaven, but his pleasure in that thought does not demonstrate the existence of a future life. The wish is stronger to the thought, but the thought is a father to the proof.

It is curious to note, moreover, that the troubles which have driven some of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondents to seek consolation have driven others in the very opposite direction. "My sorrows and experience of life," writes one, "have entirely destroyed my

faith in a 'God of love.'" She evidently finds some difficulty in believing that a God of love would create a world in which such sufferings were possible and then supply a palliative to a small minority of his creatures who find themselves able to believe certain doctrines.

It is, surely, only a most pessimistic view of the world that can bring "belief through consolation" into such prominence. Christianity, apparently, has been partly responsible for the pessimism. It has taught the essential wickedness of man; it has preached dependence on Providential care; and it has turned the eyes of man from his own vile self and the corrupt things of this world to the beauties of heaven.

In this way it has created the very spirit of despair in human effort and dependence on "higher powers" which seem to have accentuated, if not created, this intense desire for heavenly comfort. When adversity comes, the believer in Providential care is apt to await, passively, the operation of Divine rescue, instead of overcoming the trouble with the exercise of courage and skill. Consequently the power of the human will to overcome trouble is weakened and the soul becomes a prey to its own weakness.

Surely, when one is asked to choose between a "gospel" which represents man as a care-worn child comforting himself with the alleged promises of an alleged creator, and a view of life which gives man the power of his own salvation and makes him the arbiter of his own destiny, there can be no hesitation. Which appeals more to the sane, courageous man: the soul that trembles at the thought of trouble, the one that, in

the face of pain and sorrow can still say with Henley,

"In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody but unbowed.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever Gods there be
For my unconquerable soul."

A word must perhaps be said with reference to the theory that belief in the supernatural makes death easier.

Apart from the fact that doctors and others who have seen death often know that the horror of dying is a figment of the religious imagination, it is clearly the doctrine of immortality that gives the prospect of death its terrors.

The belief in a future life gives the departing soul a certain nervousness ; for every believer that is sure of going to heaven, there is another who is doubtful about his destination. To the man who expects nothing beyond the grave, death is eternal sleep with no terrors whatever. All the stories of death-bed fears and repentances on the part of "unbelievers" are now discredited. There is no nation in the world so fearless of death as the "unbelieving" Japanese. Such fear, in short, seems to be reserved for the religion that adopted the figments of heaven and hell, and has not yet recovered from the effects of prolonged concentration of thought on these illusions.

Recent changes in the character of church services, and to some extent also in the tone of sermons, indicate that the churches are recognising more clearly that what the average emotional individual desires is a "satisfying" creed rather than one which is proved to be *true*.

In this respect the Roman Catholic Church has shown for centuries wonderful appreciation of the peculiarity of the uneducated religious temperament.

Its dogmas and its ceremonies appeal to the emotional, not to the rational side of human nature. Every act of submission to authority it expects from the faithful appeals to the desire for obedience and service which, in turn, the assumption of divine rights has so much to foster. Many people who turn out on a search for a satisfying religion (not, it must be remarked, for a *new* religion) turn finally from all the faiths of East and West to the Church of Rome. Why? Mainly because of its absolute, uncompromising nature. Its claims and the power which it attains of soothing doubts. It supplies a permanent standard of faith ; a character almost unchanging from generation to generation impresses the soul bewildered with uncertainties as the prospect of a long-lost harbour charms the sailor who has been buffeted by conflicting winds and waves for long weary years.

And when the act of faith is accomplished, the Roman Church takes care that its power over the emotions shall be strengthened and made permanent. Money is lavished on churches to make them impressive and beautiful, so that their very splendour stimulates the finer feelings and menages the senses. Every effort is made to render the elaborate Church more attractive as possible, while feasts and other occasions are made the theatre for displays of the pride and pomp of gorgeous religious ceremonial.

By means of the confessional, and of the ceremonies in connection with

baptism, confirmation, marriage, and death, the Church keeps in touch with the private and family life of its adherents, and at every turn shows a guardian interest which is never without its effect on the soul craving for guidance and sympathy.

It is for such reasons that the Roman Church continues to exist apparently undisturbed by the progress of rational thought. As far as ceremonies and similar matters are concerned the Anglican Church has proceeded on very much the same lines, and the recent recrudescence of elaborate ritual, which has roused the anger of the "Protestant" section, is a striking indication that this Church sees the need of appealing more and more to the æsthetic and emotional side of human nature. Even the dissenting Churches have moved rapidly in the same direction. Their services were never more ornate, more full of colour and "millinery," as the scoffing term goes, than they are now. In Scotland, where a modest harmonium used to be regarded as an agent of the Scarlet Woman, full choral services are quite common, and it is no longer easy to tell, from the appearance of the church and the character of the service, which sect is engaged in worship.

The problem of the Protestant Churches is, however, somewhat different from that of the Roman Church.

The former attempt to satisfy both the emotional nature and the rational nature. They exercise no dominating authority over the intellect. The result is that they present a most extraordinary medley of beliefs, from a refined Theism down to the old crude Calvinism, while the hymns and anthems they sing, and the prayers in which they join, embody

doctrines which are discredited in the pulpit.

Herein lies the weakness of the Protestant Churches and the inspiration of the doubts which appear all through the *Daily Telegraph* controversy. These Churches are semi-rational and semi-emotional; they offer fragments of truth to the mind and old illusions to the heart. Is it any wonder, then, that the people who are in search of spiritual comfort alone are disturbed by the doctrinal questions which are discussed (not decided authoritatively) in the pulpit; and that, on the other hand, those who want a wholly rational religion are discouraged with the superstitions that survive in the Church ceremonies and tinge the clerical discourses?

The Protestant Churches, in short, are tumbling between two stools. The Roman Catholic Church sits firmly on one stool—all the more doggedly, perhaps, because it has an increasing fear that it is the wrong stool.

Before leaving the subject of religious belief as the source of emotional satisfaction, it is interesting to remark that the peculiar doctrines of Theosophy, Spiritualism, and Christian Science recommend themselves mainly on the same grounds. There is a certain touch of Rationalism in all of them; least of all in Theosophy; but the extraordinary vogue which they have among women and among men of emotional temperament proves that the rational element does not predominate.

Theosophy brings ineffable peace to the soul; Spiritualism comforts us with the thought of immortality and communication with departed ones; and Christian Science induces the faithful to believe that there is no such thing

as pain in the world. The comfort arising from these doctrines is inversely proportional to the amount of critical force expended on their examination.

Anyone who has discussed matters with devotees of any of these creeds will know how difficult it is to get down to some common basis or starting point. The situation is exactly the same as that

which led a Roman Catholic canon to remark, after setting out to convert an Agnostic: "We are on different sides of a stream. You want a religion founded on reason; mine is founded on faith."

This difference illustrates the radical line of cleavage which exists between the Rationalist and all other views of religion.

CHAPTER X.

CREED AND CONDUCT

MANY of the answers in the affirmative to the question, "Do we Believe?" are due to the idea that supernatural religion and morality are so closely bound up together that if you destroy the former you also do away with the latter.

The following extract from the correspondence is a characteristic example of how creed and conduct are mingled together:—

We believe when Lord's Day after Lord's Day we kneel at that service of Holy Communion, and not only praise Him who is the Head of our new race—the man Christ Jesus, but also pray for the majority whose lives of separation from that objective Presence show that they do not believe—men who prefer the public-house to the Lord's house; women, worried with work till they have forgotten the one thing needful; enemies who prefer heresy to sound faith and schism to unity; the careless in soul of the higher life, who bestow exceeding care upon the lower life made out of dust, and returning to it again.

Another correspondent puts the same ideas more bluntly:—

If I cease to commemorate the Lord's Resurrection on the Lord's Day, I cease to be a Christian; and, ceasing to be a Christian, I shall see no great harm in following my own natural inclinations. Marriage and the dignity of parentage will become nothing to me. Questions of white slavery here and elsewhere will be of no interest to me; my callousness will be but the outcome of my want of Christian principle.

Conceptions of this kind seem to have arisen from two causes: first, that the moral teaching of Christianity is altogether unique; and, second, that the voice of conscience is the voice of God.

I have already pointed out that the ethical part of Christianity was by no means novel, and that, further, it has no supernatural elements whatever, and therefore has no bearing on the question of belief in its theological sense. But, in spite of these considerations, people continue to regard the supernatural creed and the ethical code of Christianity as forming an indissoluble whole.

Christianity, they say, was the greatest

moral force that ever existed, and if you destroy belief in the Christian God this moral force will lose its authority and its strength.

Is this so? One may grant freely that much of a morally admirable character is associated with the history of Christianity. But if one brings the charities, the schools, the missions, the lofty standard of many individual lives, into court as evidence of the moral value of Christianity, one must not forget also the bloody religious wars, the Inquisition, the notorious immorality of Popes and priesthood in the days of dominating faith, and the intolerance and bigotry of later days. The two classes of phenomena are twin offspring of Christianity; it cannot claim the one and disown the other.

Further, those who appeal in this way to the moral efficacy of Christianity must take note of the fact that at no time was there ever more earnest and widespread desire to improve the moral and physical condition of man than at the present day. Hospitals, charities of all kinds, housing schemes, labour legislation—these and a thousand kindred enterprises flourish as they never did before. Yet faith—faith in the supernatural—is everywhere decaying and on the defensive. Apparently, then, ethics in their practical form are independent of supernatural sanctions.

As for the divinity of conscience, the same arguments which have been used against the intuitionist foundations of belief apply equally well to that claim.

If conscience were a God-planted sense of right and wrong, it should direct all men alike at all times and in all places. But nothing is more familiar than the varieties of conduct which are

acceptable in different countries and the changes which have taken place in the standards of right and wrong during the evolution of human societies. Experience shows, in fact, that conscience—the indwelling feeling of right and wrong—is a natural product; it is a reflection of the ethical ideas of society, of early teaching, and a personal observation of the effects of various kinds of conduct. It can be trained to heights of extreme sensitiveness, or debased to such a level that it is practically nonexistent. Sometimes we see it as highly developed in animals as in human beings.

In a subsequent chapter the sanction for morality supplied by a rational view of ethics will be described. Meanwhile it is important to point out that the correspondents quoted above, who are ready to become immoral when the supernatural command to be good is withdrawn, take a very low view of moral duty.

A man who avoids drunkenness merely because it is contrary to the police regulations would not be considered at heart a good citizen; likewise a man who is upright, just, and charitable merely because he believes that God dictated the moral law cannot be regarded as an essentially moral man.

Consequently, those who assert that morality is dependent on supernatural authority are placed in the invidious position of saying that right conduct is not wholly admirable for its own sake. They are almost in the same category as people who believe in order to ensure their safe passage to heaven. In this connection one of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondents quoted the well-known and beautiful legend of St. Louis meeting an old woman who carried a

bucket of water in one hand and a bundle of faggots in the other. Asked by the King for what purpose her burdens were destined, the old woman replied: "With one I wish to extinguish the fires of Hell, and with the other to burn down Heaven, that men may do that which is right, not from fear of punishment or hope of reward, but solely out of love of God." The allegory, the correspondent remarks, needs no interpretation.

On the other hand, there may be many people who can say with Tennyson,

"Because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence,"

and who yet feel that morality has been so bound up with supernatural religion in the past that the destruction of religious belief may endanger the moral stability of society by destroying a formal criterion or authority.

Here, we see, there is no question of the truth or otherwise of supernaturalism—merely one of whether it should be retained as a sort of foster-parent of morality. So common is this idea that many Agnostics have been known to let their children have religious education in case the absence of a definite external authority for moral precepts should be subversive of discipline.

To this view one may reply again that morality is debased when it is embodied in authoritative commandments, and not in principles which can be rationally explained.

Moreover, the fear that the removal of an external sanction for morality will lead to immoral conduct seems much exaggerated. The motives which lead the average man to lead a moral life are complex. Early training, the example

of parents and friends, the teachings of history and personal experience, the influence of the law and of public opinion: these and other factors go to produce habits of life which, in the case of most well brought-up people, are at least approximately moral. It must not be imagined that the ordinary man analyses his motives and looks behind conscience for the ultimate sanction of morality. He is more a creature of civilised instinct than of analytical reason; imitative custom plays a larger part in his mode of life than the first principles of ethics.

Comparatively few men stop to ask why they should live clean and honourable lives. In actual life we find a large number of cases of men who have no belief in supernatural sanctions for morality, but have never felt the need of them or any other. They are members of civilised society, and behave as such without asking why or wherefore. It is only the philosophical mind that analyses conduct and probes until he finds the foundations of morality.

Misunderstandings on this point, and ignorance of the fact that Rationalism has found a more stable sanction for the moral law than any form of supernaturalism, have led many of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondents to think that the moral ideal of the Rationalist is a low one, and that he denies supernatural sanctions simply because he wants an excuse for self-indulgence.

One correspondent refers to the readiness and "wondrous credulity" with which the laity receive "the tenets of modern rationalistic literature, and find that in accepting them they are able to lead a life of ease, freed from the bearing of the Cross, which is so necessary a part of the Christian life."

The same point of view is expressed as follows by another correspondent :—

I have every respect for the position of the Freethinker where it is sincerely held and joined with high motives and purity of life. I know this is the case in many instances. But, unfortunately, it has been my lot to meet many who take that position, one fears, simply for the license it affords them.

A man whom I met some time ago told me that he did not believe the Bible, because "science had proved it to be false." Unfortunately for him, no amount of science can explain away the Sermon on the Mount nor the need of observing the Seventh Commandment.

Unfortunately for this gentleman, he will get very little credit for inferring that the Sermon on the Mount and the Seventh Commandment depend for their effective force on their association with Biblical supernaturalism. The late Sir Leslie Stephen's question, "Is the moral beauty of the Sermon on the Mount diminished or affected in the smallest degree by the fact that it came from human lips?" must be answered by every really moral man in the negative. If a body of ethical doctrines is really admirable, there must be reasons for its good qualities; and science or Rationalism would, on its own first principles, admit such reasons as proof that these doctrines should be followed.

The idea that denial of Christianity will lead to immorality is due partly to the close but adventitious connection between theology and morals referred to above, but more, perhaps, to the fact that self-abnegation has been a cardinal feature in Christian ethics, while a

rational system of ethics places more stress on self-control and on self-development.

The old conception of duty used to be to deny one's self persistently, to mortify the flesh, and to crush the natural man so that original sin would be kept under and the soul made perfect for the after-life. Dregs of this bygone doctrine, echoes of the other-world spirit which it inspired, survive among the Christian Churches and lead many believers to think that the puritanical ideal has a virtue in itself.

To a rational mind, however, the idea of self-repression for its own sake is just as immoral—hurtful to the individual and to society—as the self-indulgence which some Christians think is the only alternative. Neither one nor the other can be defended on rational grounds; and the immediate effects of self-indulgence are so patent and disastrous that the man who would be weak and foolish enough to yield to it in the absence of supernatural restraints is likely to be a victim of it under any circumstances.

The cases of men within the moral fold of the Churches who behave in the manner popularly regarded as typical of the sceptic are so painfully numerous that the Churches are not in a position to cast the first stone. And if doctrines have any influence on conduct at all, those that tell the sinner to be good because it is God's will are not likely to be so efficacious as those that express simply the verdict of experience in the effect of certain kinds of conduct on human welfare.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

IT often happens in newspaper controversies that a side issue of the main point in dispute becomes the centre of a secondary discussion. This has occurred in the "Do we Believe?" correspondence. A certain number of the contributors have crossed swords on the time-worn subject of the efficacy of prayer.

Quotations to illustrate this aspect of modern belief would be superfluous, since they would bring forward no new point or throw new light on any of the old and familiar points. Those who believe in the efficacy of prayer give instances of what they regard as answered prayer; those who do not believe merely beg to differ.

But one point that is of interest is that the great body of correspondents do not seem to attach much importance to the act of prayer. Least of all do they consider that prayer has any objective value.

Before considering the significance of this change from the once uncompromising attitude of believers, it may be worth while to point out that there is no way of really proving that prayer is efficacious.

Apart from the gigantic assumptions which the theory of efficacious prayer involves, the fact that one receives a favour prayed for does not necessarily mean that God—supposing a personal God to exist—exerted himself to alter the course of nature to bring about the

desired result. It is at least equally possible that the end in view was produced in the ordinary course of things. The *onus probandi*—and a heavy one it is—lies upon the believer who asserts that because he asks God to do a certain thing the uniformity of nature, the sequence of natural cause and effect, is upset for his benefit.

On the other hand, nothing is too wonderful for the thoroughgoing believer in prayer. His supplications may be denied a thousand times; he merely remarks that it is not God's will that they should be answered. If on the thousand and first time he is successful, his thankfulness prevents him wondering whether the same event might not have occurred without his appeal to a supernatural power. In this case again faith is a matter of intuition or instinct, not of demonstration. The inductive evidence of the efficacy of prayer is so weak that it seems to make little or no impression on the majority of those who are really quite willing to believe.

There are cases, nevertheless, which have given a great stimulus to the survival of this form of belief. Some people are never tired of referring to the case of George Muller, the manager of orphan homes, who never advertised for voluntary contributions: he simply prayed for them, and he always got just the sum he had prayed for.

Can this phenomenon, it is asked, be

explained in any other way than that God answered his prayers? Unfortunately for the theory of the efficacy of prayer, it can. Everybody knows that Mr. Muller prayed for money and got it, but everybody does not know that after he prayed he wrote to one of the many pious and philanthropic people who were in the habit of bestowing money on his enterprise, telling him or her that he had asked God for a certain sum of money. The necessary cheque followed as a matter of course, and the efficacy of prayer was fully proved.

Thus is the theory of prayer reduced to an absurdity, if not to the level of conscious fraud. It is not, however, its absurdity or its weakness under direct criticism that has led the Churches to give it a very insignificant position, or to set it aside altogether. Once more we find that the indirect attack through increasing knowledge has been much more efficient than the direct critical assault. What is killing the belief in prayer is the evidence science has brought of the unwavering uniformity of nature, and of the hopelessly insignificant position which the world and its inhabitants occupy in the universe.

When men believed that the world was the centre of the universe, and that everything had been created for their particular benefit, it was natural to assume that the Creator might adjust the machinery of nature to suit the fervent desires of his faithful believers.

The supplications which were originally addressed to deified ancestors and to racial gods were repeated to the *Creator who made himself known in*

miracles and other revelations. Nothing was known then of the conservation of matter and energy; divine intervention was merely a superior form of witchcraft. The first blow at this geocentricism was struck by Copernicus, who demonstrated that the sun, and not the earth, was the centre of the known universe.

Further astronomical discoveries revealed the operation of order in the solar system so persistent that the position of the heavenly bodies could be predicted with certainty; the earth was dethroned from its supreme position, and became a mere speck in the immensity of space. Discoveries in geology showed that man was a comparatively recent product of a long course of evolution; and zoology showed that he had not been created in God's image, but developed from the lower animals. Both in space and in time the affairs of men became, in the light of these new discoveries, infinitesimal; and nature was seen to follow, with unwavering certainty, the law of causation, and not the varying law of Providential control.

In this way the teachings of science created a mental atmosphere in which the possibility of our petty momentary likes and dislikes being met by a derangement of the cosmos was seen to be the merest vanity.

The belief in the efficacy of prayer is, of course, associated with that spirit of dependence which leads to faith through submission, and is so contrary to the spirit of the time. When the hope of help from heaven is finally abandoned the reliance of manhood on its own unaided effort will be strengthened and completed.

One has to choose, in fact, between

appealing to an imaginary Power whose assistance is problematical, and trusting to the intellect and the will which de-

serve the credit of all that goes by the name of human progress.

CHAPTER XII.

RATIONALISM AND BELIEF

THE various reasons for belief in a supernatural religion, as given by the contributors to the "Do we Believe?" controversy, have now been described and discussed.

I am well aware that professional apologists might find other reasons than those embodied in this discussion. Religion nowadays takes so many phases, and each phase has so many independent apologists! But it is at least certain that the foundations of religious belief with which I have dealt are the only ones that appeal with force to any considerable section of the general public.

The vast dimensions of the controversy and its spontaneity shut out the possibility that any really vital ground of belief has lacked a champion. The confessions of faith contained in these letters seem to be as comprehensive as they are honest.

In fact, they may appear to be comprehensive to the point of confusion. The task of analysing each in turn seems easy compared with that of finding the common denominator of all the reasons for religious faith. Nevertheless, a moderate amount of study will reveal that all the reasons which we have discussed fall naturally into two classes: first, those which are dogmatic in cha-

racter, and, second, those which appeal to the heart or the temperament.

Some of the reasons given belong to both classes, but all of them belong to at least one. Where supernaturalism is not associated with the Bible, the authority of the Church, or ethical preconceptions, it is presented in a form which appeals to the emotions as being "consoling" or "satisfying." The existence of these two fundamental features redeems religious faith to some extent from the charge of chaos which might well be levelled against it, in view of the multitude of forms which it takes at the present day. Although the species are numerous, they all bear the hall-mark of the genus.

Similarly, the recognition of the foundations upon which all kinds of religious faith stand enables us to mark a very distinct line of cleavage between them, and which may be termed rational faith. The appeal to Authority and to the Heart are on one side; on the other is the uncompromising appeal to Reason alone.

It is not denied, of course, that some modern forms of religion, particularly the more refined varieties of Theism and Unitarianism, claim that they make their

appeal to human reason. To the extent that they honestly do so they are rationalistic; and if they recognise that Reason is to be the final arbitrator in every essential and every detail of their faith, then no one will deny them the right to call their teachings rational. The existence of bodies making such claims is in itself a token of the triumph of Rationalism.

They are not, however, a large section of the Christian Churches of to-day; and in many instances where Reason is ostensibly adopted as the guide to faith, dogma and appeals to the emotions are not neglected. If a general view of the Churches be taken, they may best be described as semi-rationalist—rationalist up to a certain point which does not involve fundamental dogmas, but not beyond it.

The *Daily Telegraph* correspondents, on the whole, are in much the same position. They reason about certain matters, but believe on the basis of dogmas or feelings about which they do not reason. The principle is not applied to the root and trunk as well as to the branches of the tree of faith.

There is no doubt, however, that Rationalism in its critical form is continuing to go deeper and deeper towards the fundamentals of Christian and other forms of supernatural faith. The Churches themselves show it not only in the Rationalism which we hear every Sunday preached from numerous pulpits, but in the gradual waning of the importance attached to dogma and in the gradual waxing of the ethical side of religion and the appeal to the emotions. "Ours," said Dr. Jessop recently, "is a decaying profession." Who does not hear, in that admission, the swan-song of the living Church?

If one may judge from the religious situation in America and the popularity of Christian Science, Spiritualism, and other modern "fads" in this country as well, the religion of temperament is likely to survive the religion of supernatural dogma and to be the most formidable opponent of Rationalism. With a man who asserts certain things as matters of fact it is possible to argue. But with a man who says that his faith "satisfies" him, whether it is true or not, how is it possible to argue? The criterion is simply one of temperament, not of truth. Yet there seems to be an increasing number of people who are quite willing to accept a new faith on no better recommendation.

This seems to be due to the fact that, while critical Rationalism has disintegrated the old beliefs so much that the general public is increasingly sceptical, the positive ideal presented by Rationalism has not been appreciated in the same degree.

I mentioned before that the destructive work of Rationalism was necessitated solely by the widespread acceptance of irrational beliefs, which had to be proved untenable before the minds of men were ready to accept rational principles. Now that the dissolution of dogma is being gradually completed, the world, turning away dissatisfied from altar and pulpit, is casting round for some permanent foundations of belief. The moment has arrived in which to demonstrate not only that Rationalism can construct as well as destroy, but that it is only by means of it that a genuine belief can be attained.

It may be useful to repeat here the definition of Rationalism adopted by the Rationalist Press Association:—

Rationalism may be defined as the mental attitude which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions or authority.

This statement shows how distinct the principle of Rationalism is from any principle underlying the creeds of the Christian Churches.

Instead of referring questions to the Bible, the Church, to tradition, to the emotions, it brings them all, the deepest and the broadest, to the bar of Reason, to be tested there in the light of accumulated experience. When Rationalism becomes the guiding principle, the sole question possible about any statement, any religious system, any code of morals, is always the same: "Is it true?"

This is the principle which men habitually apply in the ordinary affairs of daily life, and in the scientific investigations which have given us our wonderful insight into the mechanism of the universe. In such matters no one would think of applying any other principle; and all that the consistent Rationalist does is to declare that the same principle ought to be extended, with the same unswerving loyalty, to matters of religious belief.

When the mind is freed from the trammels of supernaturalism, it seems impossible that any other principle can be adopted in the case where truth should be regarded as most vital—the case of religion and its life-ideals. But the Rationalist is faced by repeated declarations, reflected in the "Do we Believe?" controversy, that in religion other standards than that of Reason must be applied. It is therefore necessary to commit a sort of philosophical tautology, and *give reasons for Rationalism.*

The justification of Rationalism is two-fold. Firstly, the knowledge alleged to be derived from any other source than that of evidence which may be examined and corroborated has been found unsatisfactory. Secondly, all the advances in human knowledge, and the accompanying improvements in the mental, moral, and social conditions of the world, have been the outcome of the exercise of human reason.

With regard to the first point, the discussion of the supernatural sources of belief contained in the preceding chapters supplies at least a partial proof that they are untrustworthy. The teachings derived from them are variable, sometimes mutually contradictory, often opposed to the plain facts of experience. The deadliest blow of all, however, is the demonstration that their supernatural quality is an illusion. Every one of the messages from the "other world" can be traced back to its ultimate origins in the crude deductions of primitive man from familiar experiences, such as sleep, death, and natural cataclysms. Every supernatural dogma or intuition is proved by impregnable facts to be a product of natural evolution from natural sources.

Side by side with this rational destruction of the claims of supernaturalism there has proceeded the building-up of the wonderful edifice of human knowledge.

When one thinks how recently, in a geological sense, man emerged from the brute stage, and how very much more recently his mind emerged from the darkness of ignorance and superstition, the results achieved by his reasoning powers are most impressive. With the exception of astronomy and physics most of the great sciences are things

of a few generations. Chemistry, geology, zoology, ethnology, and a hundred branches of knowledge have done most of their work since the beginning of the nineteenth century; yet already we have weighed the planets, measured the distances of stars, traced the course of evolution through countless intricate stages back to primeval chaos, thrown a flood of light on the constitution of man, and reduced the diversity of matter to an ultimate unity. By our energy and inventiveness we have transformed the face of the earth, multiplied its fertility, promoted free intercourse between nations, devised countless things to minister to the improvement and happiness of mankind, and in many ways hastened the steps of civilisation.

Man alone, with his brain and hands, has done all this and more. Are not the means which have done so much in so short a time, and made the present so full of promise, sufficient to realise the highest destiny if they are allowed to exercise their utmost powers?

The faith of the Rationalist is, briefly, that reason should be supreme in every department of human activity. In philosophy, morals, religion, and education, as well as in politics and science, the criterion of tested Truth must be applied unflinchingly, and in the amplest confidence that the result will be good. Knowledge becomes the basis of all belief, and the structure of belief must be logically acceptable. In the adoption of that simple, straightforward principle lies the kernel of Rationalism, and it is that principle which is offered in place of the babel of principles which congregate in the name of supernaturalism.

It is sometimes asserted that a de-

liberate insistence on the supremacy of reason will lead to the emotional and æsthetic sides of human nature being stunted. If we are to analyse and probe everything, it is said, we shall become all brain and no heart or sensibility. When you dissect an emotion you kill it; when you investigate art, you destroy beauty. Thus the life of the Rationalist will become intellectualised to a point that makes it repellent to the really human personality.

Such criticisms are disposed of at once by the reflection that the suppression of the emotional and æsthetic sides of human nature would be most irrational. If any kind of human capability is really worth retaining and cultivating, it is only reasonable that it should be treasured and developed.

I hope to show that the ideal of human life which emerges from a rational study of human nature is an ideal of self-realisation, in which every human faculty is exercised to the highest degree consistent with equal freedom on the part of others. The rational aim is therefore not an intellectualised life so much as a *full* life. And while the pursuit of knowledge will certainly be an integral part of life's activities, the exercise of the affections and the æsthetic powers cannot possibly be omitted. The sole obligation placed upon the individual is that his ideas and his principles of conduct should be thoroughly rational, or, to put it in a more homely way, reasonable.

Before giving an outline of the view of the universe and of human life which is associated with Rationalism, it may be interesting to point out that such an agitation as the "Do we Believe?" controversy would never be possible if

the Rationalist principle were accepted. To address the question, "Do you Believe?" to a Rationalist is like asking a fish if it swims. Belief, to a Rationalist, is simply the result of his thought regarding his experience; it is the logical expression of his knowledge. Consequently "doubt" has no terrors for him; it can only exist where the evidence is apparently conflicting, or where there is a lack of it. In such cases he simply suspends judgment until he

knows more. Hence his serenity in discussion and his freedom from the shadow of "unbelief" that haunts the dogmatic or emotional "believer."

From the Rationalist point of view, I may repeat, it is the people who refuse to accept the verdict of fact and reason alone that are the true unbelievers. They disbelieve in the duty of rational proof in all things. They refuse to give a verdict according to the weight of evidence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD AND OF LIFE

FROM time to time I have referred to the fact that the most formidable enemy of dogmatic creeds is the world-system which science has enabled us to build up. It is necessary, therefore, for the completeness of the argument in favour of a rational as opposed to a dogmatic or emotional attitude towards religious questions, to describe the scientific view of the universe and its problems.

The reader must not infer, however, that the critical or negative side of scientific thought has not been most valuable in exposing the unsoundness of the pretensions made on behalf of supernaturalism.

One of the main benefits of education in science is that it trains the mind to a habit of investigation. It develops the faculty of sifting evidence and of deducing logically the proper conclusion *therefrom*. It encourages an attitude

of mind which is fatal to unproved assumptions, however authoritatively put forward, and it inspires a wholesome respect for the truth above all things.

Science has thus proved a powerful solvent of the once unyielding structure of dogma. But even after its destructive work is done the mind of man is apt to slip back to the traditional ideas unless it is turned to building up a new system of ideas.

History has given many examples of nations which were carried forward on a wave of scepticism which receded soon afterwards into the ocean of faith. Church apologists are now referring to that phenomenon and comforting their supporters with the assurance that the reaction from modern Rationalism will come in the same way.

But, in saying that the past is certain to repeat itself and bring back dogma to

its kingdom again, they reckon without a new factor in the situation. Rationalism in former days went little further than proving that supernatural belief was untenable; Rationalism in the present day is able not only to say with far greater force than before that the old solution of the world's mysteries is wrong, but to give a new and demonstrably true solution in its place.

The overwhelming evidence which it can bring to the support of that solution affords the firmest guarantee that there will be no turning back. As the dim temples of the old dark faiths decay the bright temple of the new rises to claim its increasing multitude of worshippers.

Science has, in fact, given us a revelation of the world. The primitive ideas which were embodied in the Bible and dominated thought a century ago were merely random guesses born in ignorance and nurtured in superstition. They were, so to say, attempted transcriptions of hieroglyphics to which the readers had no key.

By establishing the truth of the doctrine of evolution science put in the hands of man the key to the world's cipher. In the light of evolution—the process of slow growth from simple, comparatively formless beginnings to various highly-specialised conditions—dark ways were made bright. Applying the principle to every kind of phenomenon, from the making of worlds to the building of religious systems, the crooked ways were made straight.

For the stability of the doctrine of evolution does not depend only upon the vast and increasing amount of evidence which has been brought to its proof. The soundness of the doctrine is corroborated by the invaluable way in

which it unravels difficulties which were hopeless in former days.

There is not a single department of human thought—psychology, geology, chemistry, anatomy, astronomy, physics, ethics, or religion itself—which has not been transformed and gifted with new life since evolution became the guiding principle. I mention religion particularly, because the idea of evolution has been of the greatest aid in tracing what some people still regard as heaven-born intuitions back through successive stages of development from the most primitive sources.

The conception which we have now of the origin of the world, of life, and of man is—thanks to evolution—totally different from that which satisfied the minds of men when they were dominated by dogma.

The old idea of creation—the making of something out of nothing by the agency of an inexplicable something-else—has been totally abandoned. In its place we have the principle of the conservation of matter and of energy, based on inductive proof that both matter and energy are never destroyed, but merely transformed into equivalent substances or modes.

The inference is that the universe, or the solar system, as we know it now, was already existing in embryo countless æons ago, when it was in the state of nebulous fire-mist which the telescope reveals as the condition of remote stellar bodies to-day.

The study of these bodies and of the nearer sun and planets enables the astronomer to retrace in imagination the steps in the evolution of the solar system from this homogeneous primeval mass. This mass may have been flung

off from some still greater mass of revolving nebula, but the position, rotation, and other characteristics of the planets show that they were detached one by one from a central sun in the process of cooling.

Our earth was one of the least important bodies thus formed, and it, in turn, flung off the moon, which holds up to the eyes of man the ultimate fate of their habitation. At the moment of detachment the earth was a molten mass; and as it circled year by year round its source it cooled gradually until a solid crust formed upon its surface, to be broken up repeatedly by outbursts of internal energy.

This process illustrates the cardinal features of evolution as Spencer defined it—the change from an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to definite coherent heterogeneity of structure and function through successive differentiations and integrations. In place of a practically formless nebula, we have got, by a continuous process, a group of bodies differentiated from each other by structure and function, and all bound together in a distinct unity. And on the earth itself the same change from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous went on during the cooling process. From the uniform molten mass substance after substance was precipitated as the temperature decreased and the earth became more and more heterogeneous. Water separated itself from solid and air from water; and at this period, as all the signs go to indicate, life made its appearance on the globe.

At this point, according to a popular impression, evolution must step

aside and let a creative force come into play.

However, apart from the consideration that a creator is just as difficult to explain as a creation, this intrusion into the course of natural development is inadmissible.

If we are to accept evolution at all (and the consensus of knowledge forces it upon the really open mind), we must accept it as applicable in all cases and at all times. When the conservation of matter and energy is made the keystone of our world-system, the introduction of some absolutely new form of either is a radical inconsistency. An infinite and eternal universe must, as was said before, contain the potentiality of all things.

The choice, therefore, lies between abandoning the theory of evolution by scouting the most overwhelming proof and using it consistently to throw what light it can on the obscure parts of the processes of nature.

On the other hand, the evolutionist is not asked to strain his theory to breaking point merely to deny one article in the creed of supernaturalism. When we look closely into the subject the origin of living matter is not such an abnormal mystery after all.

The development of all forms of organic life has been traced down to the fundamental living substance called protoplasm. Its chemical analysis shows it to be a substance somewhat more complex than many substances which the chemist is able to produce in his laboratory. But although its constituents are "inert," and although the nearest approach which we can make to it is still non-living matter, it does not follow that any extraneous or

creative principle is involved in its formation. Chemists are familiar with the fact that chemical compounds display properties utterly different from those of their constituents, and that the addition of an extra atom in a combination will produce a radically different result.

Thus a molecule of water has quite different properties from the two atoms of hydrogen and the one of oxygen which form it; and if two atoms of oxygen are combined with two of hydrogen the result is a powerful bleaching agent. Further, chemistry is also familiar with substances which are the same in chemical composition, but different, through some molecular peculiarities, in physical qualities.

Consequently, there is nothing exceptional in the idea that, under certain special conditions never since repeated in the earth's history, the protoplasmic molecule was formed by the combination of carbon and other elements. It may be that protoplasm, as we know it, was not formed right away, but developed through several stages which man has not yet been able to trace.

But in any case there is, scientifically speaking, nothing more mysterious about the formation of protoplasm from a certain group of elements than there is about the formation of water from hydrogen and oxygen. The comparison with the latter phenomenon is far closer than with the often-quoted one of the formation of crystals in a solution. Crystal-making is merely the re-arrangement of molecules without a radical change in the properties of the substance. Protoplasm-making is far more likely to have been a chemical change, giving a substance with functions un-

revealed in the separate elements which formed it.

Within the last few months two eminent men of science, Lord Kelvin and Sir Oliver Lodge, have attempted to make the origin of life a gulf over which science cannot stretch.

The authority of their names has had so great an effect that the apostles of supernaturalism have seized upon their declarations on the subject with a suspicious and almost pathetic eagerness. I do not think it necessary to deal with their attitude in the matter, since they bring not one single new idea to bear upon this threadbare problem. But in view of the impression which they have made on the people who are struggling to "believe" it is necessary to make three protests.

First, that the eminence of Sir Oliver Lodge and Lord Kelvin in the domain of physics does not imply that they are capable experts on a biological question.

Second, that the eminence of their position does not make their opinions any more or less valid than they are intrinsically.

And third, that their treatment of this subject has been purely speculative; that is to say, it has not kept strictly to the logical analysis of evidence, but has started right away in a metaphysical atmosphere—which, as everybody knows, is much more perilous than the stable ground of fact.

Further, their obvious desire to twist what Mr. P. Chalmers Mitchell calls the "ultimate uncertainties of science" to suit the assumptions of dogmatic creeds is enough to justify the unsympathetic attitude of the general body of scientific men towards their recent excursions in religious apologetics.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EVOLUTION OF MAN

WITH the origin of life the evolution of the earth enters on a new and more complex phase. This is the direct starting-point of the long process of development which has given us the wonderful diversity of plants and animals, and crowned itself with the evolution of the human race itself.

Intricate as the process has been, geology, botany, zoology, and psychology enable us to trace it in broad and firm outlines. From the primeval homogeneous cell, which reproduced itself by the simple act of division, we see evolved organisms formed of groups of cells, which become more and more differentiated in character and function—more specialised, and at the same time more firmly integrated into distinct units.

The forces at work in this evolution were the influence of environment on matter sensitive to external influence, and able to reproduce its characteristics. No supernatural power, no agency other than that of natural selection, was required to bring about that wonderful slow unfolding of complex organisms from the ultimate simple cell.

If we build up the genealogical tree of the living world, we find that at a very early stage there is a division of the main trunk into two branches, one of which leads to the animal and the other to the vegetable divisions of organic life. In some of the lowest forms of life now known, such as micro-organisms, it is difficult to say whether they belong to *the animal or the vegetable kingdoms.*

The features of these simple organisms point clearly to the time when the two kingdoms were not distinguished.

On the vegetable side of the tree of life we can trace the development of fungus-like organisms into mosses and through ferns, palms, and other types to the most highly-organised trees and plants which geology and botany reveal.

On the animal side there has been greater diversity, and the type of organism ultimately evolved is, of course, much higher. The difference seems to have been due to the evolution, in the case of animals, of the nerve-structure. The lowest cell-organisms respond to stimuli in a primitive way all over their surface. At a later stage some parts become more sensitive to stimuli, and rudimentary nerve-tracks are formed. By a continuation of the same process of specialisation the nervous system, as we know it in the fully-developed animal, was ultimately produced. Science is able to trace the highly-organised sense-organs, such as the eye and the ear, down through a continuous chain of stages to what may be called the protoplasmic sense of touch.

Fragmentary as the fossil remains already discovered may be, they enable us to re-write the story of animal evolution with the aid of the evidence which zoology supplies.

Many of the primitive forms of animal life discovered in fossiliferous rocks have died out in the struggle for existence,

but others became the forerunners of important groups, like the star-fish, the mollusca, the myriad-peopled world of insects, the crustaceans, and the fishes.

Taking the line of evolution which interests us most—that leading to man himself—we come to an important point when the water-living organisms became amphibious and then developed to the reptile stage. Here one branch leads to the bird family; many of the reptiles which geology has reconstructed from fossil remains had wings. The main branch, however, continued by slow development to the mammalian stage, to which marsupials, lemurs, elephants, seals, lions and other beasts of prey, and, most important of all, the family of apes belong.

Here we stir the ashes of a dead controversy. It is almost with wonder that we recall the fervour of the discussion about the descent of man from the apes—fervour so intense that the dispute spread far beyond scientific bounds and made the phrase, “the missing link,” a popular by-word. Now it is recognised that the arguments which Darwin, Huxley, Haeckel, and others, deduced in proof of the evolution of the *genus homo* from an ape-like ancestor are impregnable.

Man bears in every bone, nerve, and fibre the stamp of his origin; and anyone who sets out now to re-write the genealogical tree of the human race so as to insinuate an element of the supernatural and remove the unattractive ape has a task before him which even the most daring apologists of religious faith hesitate to tackle.

In this case, again, as in the problem of the origin of life, the general view exaggerated the gulf over which supernatural forces alone were supposed to be able to leap.

The difference in structure and in mental power between the higher apes and primitive man was less than that between the latter and civilised man. Yet people who were willing to grant—because the evidence was plain in history and archaeology—that the savage might develop naturally through slow stages to the level of civilised man hesitated to admit the less formidable possibility that the savage had an animal ancestor.

But this important point does not rest on possibilities alone. The constitution of man is explicable only on the theory that he was derived from an ape-like animal. There are many details of his body which are survivals of organs which had a use in earlier stages of evolution, but have, through man learning to stand upright or changing his habits in other ways, become wholly or partly useless. The design of the human skeleton is plainly one more suited to walking on all fours than perpendicularly.

The most convincing proof, however, is that afforded by embryology.

On no other theory than that of evolution can we explain the fact that the human organism, in the time preceding birth, rehearses all the stages of the evolution of the race. At the time of conception two simple cells, undistinguishable from the reproductive cells of innumerable other animals, unite to form a new individual life, which, in developing within the womb, passes first through forms which typify the groups of lower organisms. At a later stage the foetus develops gill-like clefts which correspond to the gills of the aquatic ancestors of man.

And up to a late stage in development the foetus is almost indistinguishable from that of other vertebrates. The

fact that the embryos of the dog, the ape, and of men are alike in many particulars, is corroborative evidence of a common origin which no amount of sophism can destroy.

The great difficulty about accepting the theory of the natural origin of man is that the human reasoning power is said to be different from any mental power which could have been evolved from the animal. Once more the objectors are creating their own puzzle by taking an extreme case on one side of the gulf and contrasting it with a case on the other side.

If we take the lowest type of human being and the highest type of animal, there is not so much difference, after all, between their respective mental equipments. Comparative psychology shows that there is no radical or "unbridgeable" difference between an act of reasoning and an instinctive act (which we grant to animals). Further, it proves that mental power corresponds always to the stage of development which the nervous organisation has reached; and the human brain is different from that of the highest vertebrates only in the complexity of its organisation.

Just as consciousness rose from the simple "irritability" of protoplasm, so the self-consciousness which is the pride of man rose from the consciousness of the brute. In the human individual life we see the process repeated; the simple cell develops through continuous stages from sub-conscious life to the full possession of self-consciousness and reasoning powers.

It has been possible, within such short limits, to give only the merest sketch of the outline of world-evolution, but *enough has perhaps been said to indicate*

that science gives a connected and reasoned explanation of the process by which the earth, with its burden of humanity and other life-forms, was evolved from primeval nebulae. On the face of it, such an explanation is radically different from that associated with the accepted forms of "belief." There is no place in it for supernatural agencies or interference; there is nothing but a slow unfolding of diverse and more diverse forms of substance and life, in fulfilment of the energy possessed by what we call matter.

As to the ultimate why and wherefore of this long, long process of evolution science can say nothing. It is willing to confess its ignorance on this point, and on the kindred point of the nature of the reality underlying phenomena, simply because there are no means of obtaining any evidence whatever on the subject.

Men may speculate about it as they please and woo their "intuitions" to tell them the secret, but the very nature of thought prevents these imaginings being any more than phantoms of the mind. It is the proud boast of religion that it has overcome the impossible and solved the fundamental riddle; but, since religion gave us a story of the world which we now find was totally remote from the facts, one may be pardoned for casting doubts upon the validity of the claim.

The rational mind will leave all such spurious problems in the realm of fantastic speculation. It is no use crying for the moon, or consoling yourself with the thought that it is in your grasp. The world of fact holds more marvels than were ever dreamt of in transcendental philosophy, and the progress of science opens up wider and wider horizons of

phenomena to be discovered and investigated. Science will have done a great work if it turns the thoughts of men from the altars of departed gods to

the rich, living universe that lies around them, and of which they themselves are the most marvellous and interesting product.

CHAPTER XV.

RATIONALISM AND MORALITY

ALTHOUGH the evolutionary world-idea which I have indicated is of the greatest value in correcting the cosmogony which underlies supernatural faith, and in substituting a tenable view of the history of the world and of man, its value does not end there. It has a direct bearing on what one may call the practical side of religion—the principles of conduct and the nature of the ideal life towards which men should direct their efforts.

According to once orthodox belief, the moral law was derived from the authoritative announcements of the Deity, confirmed by the voice of a divinely-implanted conscience.

Now, however, the purely human source of these announcements has been proved, and conscience itself explained as a product of evolution varying with time and place in a way impossible to an instinct rooted in the divine.

From the new point of view the moral law is regarded simply as the embodiment or the expression of the experience and traditions of society.

Animal societies have their moral codes, in which fidelity, courage, mutual assistance, parental love, faithfulness in

sex relations, self-sacrifice, and many other high ethical qualities are revealed. The fact that the possession of one or more of these qualities has aided them to survive in the struggle for existence shows how morality, in the broad sense, may be explained as a product of natural evolution.

Both in human and lower animal societies certain lines of conduct tend to the welfare of the community, with the result that those communities exhibiting these beneficial qualities in the highest degree become the most firmly established. Conversely, anti-social behaviour reacts on the community with a more or less destructive result.

On this simple basis of cause and effect one can explain the slow development not only of highly-organised animal societies, but also of the civilised human race.

At each point in the progress from the family or tribe to nations of increasing size and increasing complexity in the nature of their contents and their mutual relations, the code of conduct accepted or enforced was a reflection of the condition of society. In the Old Testament the intelligent reader can trace such a moral evolution on the

part of the Jewish tribes. The whole of history shows how man learned by slow and painful degrees in the school of experience what modes of conduct were most beneficial in private, social, national, and international life. The lesson is still unfinished, since each advance in civilisation alters, as it were, the moral environment of society and demands a new adjustment on the part of individuals.

But, as Spencer and others have shown with great wealth of illustrative detail, it is this continual effort on the part of man to adjust himself to his environment that constitutes the main-spring of social and moral progress. On the one hand we have the individual man struggling to express himself, to exercise his physical activities, his feelings, and his mental powers; and on the other hand we have the limitations imposed by the equal desire on the part of others to realise their capabilities in the same way.

Social progress is represented by the change from the simple adjustments of these contending forces required in tribal life to the more complex balancing of barbaric existence, and to the still more complex adjustments, demanding a high measure of education and control, which life in a civilised community implies.

By developing this idea of the natural evolution of morals it is possible to find an adequate explanation of modern ethical codes, and also of the sense of right and wrong, which we call conscience.

The same conception supplies a sanction or authority for morality more secure (because more reasonable) and *more appealing* (because more human)

than that afforded by any alleged divine revelation. But what the individual wants most in this practical world is an immediate rather than an ultimate reason why he should be moral.

The evolutionary view of morals supplies it by proving that moral conduct is precisely that which conduces to the highest welfare of the individual and of society. It demonstrates that man can find his truest happiness solely in the exercise of his faculties, with a due sense of the rights of others. Thus egoism and altruism become wedded at the altar of evolution.

The natural sanction for morality can, moreover, be made still more immediate in its power.

Evolution introduces the idea of causation into the moral sphere. It proves that actions and their results are bound together by an unbreakable chain of cause and effect, or, rather, that each action is a pebble dropped into the pool of life radiating its influence infinitely in all directions. There is no need to create a heaven to reward virtue, or a hell to punish vice; they have their inevitable result in this world.

For its own protection, and for the reformation of the individual, society imposes penalties and restrictions on the wrong-doer; but not all the forces on earth can prevent a bad action having bad consequences, or a good action being blessed with good results. That which a man sows he shall also reap—not because God said he would, but because the sequence of effect and cause is as inflexible in the moral sphere and in the natural world. Neither prayers, nor repentance, nor forgiveness, will wash out our sins; they can be atoned for only by good actions which may compensate for the injury done to the individual

character, and to all affected by their influence.

In the light of such an iron law of retribution, whose invariable action is seen in every event of the moral history of the world, against whose fiat there is no appeal, it is impossible to suggest that moral laxity is the outcome of a rational view of ethics. When the sternness of the natural law of duty is realised we are more likely to hear that it imposes too terrible a weight of moral responsibility.

If, the Christian may say, there is not a God to appeal to for plenary pardon, no Mediator who sacrificed himself on the cross in order that the effects of original sin might be cancelled, what hope is there for faltering, sin-imbued humanity? The greatest consolation of religion, he may say, is that it offers the penitent sinner a clear direct way out of the consequences of sin. He has only to believe in Jesus Christ, who took upon himself the iniquities of the world.

Are we, then, to forego these beautiful promises, and to echo the unrelenting words of Omar Khayyam?

The Moving Finger writes ; and, having writ,
Moves on : nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

I sincerely hope the day may come when this will be the main objection urged against the Rationalist view of moral duty. After having had Rationalism accused for so long of opening the gate to moral laxity, of encouraging self-indulgence and even of being indifferent to vice, it will be pleasant to be told that its cardinal fault is that it does not make sufficient allowance for the moral weakness of mankind.

Happily, it is as easy to answer one objection as the other.

Rationalism, in its moral aspect, is neither indulgent nor cruel. It is merely just. If it demonstrates that evil always begets evil, it proves likewise that good is the parent of good. If it holds that immoral conduct cannot have its effects erased by an act of grace, it shows that they may be balanced by the results of moral conduct. Thus it supplies not only a deterrent from evil, but a further stimulus to good conduct.

I may refer here to the familiar fact of the grave moral danger which lurks in the idea that sins may be wiped out by the aid of belief in certain supernatural dogmas.

Nothing, surely, could tend more directly to encourage moral laxity than a full trust in such a mechanism for eliminating the consequences of sin. The Roman Catholic Church has developed this trust to a high degree by its confessional system, but all the Churches are alike in encouraging believers to think that their sins will be forgiven and annulled. This is a vain hope, and it is a hope which, in proportion to its strength, stifles the voice of conscience.

In whom is the sense of moral duty likely to be more keen: the man who thinks that an act of faith will give him a fresh start with a clean slate; or the man who knows that good alone can cast out evil?

The apparent harshness of the law of inflexible causation in the moral world is relieved by the vision of the progress which has already been made under its operation.

The doctrine of evolution has killed the old idea of the "fall of man" and his redemption by supernatural aid. In place of that primitive conception it has

given us the outline of a slow development from the primitive to the civilised man, and points the way to a continuation of that development to still higher levels.

When one rises above the narrow circle of present-day conditions, and looks backward over the course of human history to the remote days when man became first distinguished from the brute, one gains an impressive sense of the moral as well as the intellectual advance which has been achieved in the interval.

At first the rate of progress was slow, but each step upward seemed to make the next more easy. Stained as the early pages of the human story are with blood, cruelty, and lust, they show clearly enough how the race, by its own efforts, struggled out of the slough of savagery to the uncertain ground of barbarism, and later, with the aid of arts and sciences, established itself on the firm ground of an elementary civilisation.

Rightly read, that story is far more inspiring than the conceptions of supernaturalism. It proves the reality of progress—progress which each generation inherits from its predecessor, carries a step further, and hands down in its improved form to its successor. Thus the effect of progress is cumulative, as we see in the more rapid rate of advance recorded in recent centuries compared with the stone-age and even less remote periods. Moreover, in the earlier stages man was not conscious of his destiny. Now, thanks to his knowledge of, and mastery over, nature, social evolution has become, as it were, self-conscious. We understand the processes which have made us what we are, and we know that we can, to a great extent, create our environment on the lines that make for further progress.

Man, in short, is still evolving, and no one who keeps in mind the wonderful past of the human race will venture to set limits to the degree of development which he may yet attain.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IDEALS OF RATIONALISM

FROM these imperfect outlines of modern evolutionary thought, it may be gathered that the principle of Rationalism, when applied to available knowledge, gives a view of the material universe, life, and human nature founded on fact and logically consistent.

It gives us also a new conception of

moral evolution, and supplies a new basis of, and incentive towards, the principles of good conduct. I may, in conclusion, indicate the practical outcome of the ideal of progress which it presents.

At the present day and all through human history we witness a struggle

between man, with his activities, desires, and ambitions, and his material and social environment.

That struggle is the motive power of progress, which will not be complete until man is in perfect harmony with his environment. When that happens the individual will have, in the words of Spencer, "no desires but those which may be satisfied without exceeding his proper sphere of action, while society maintains no restraints but those which the individual voluntarily respects."

This absolutely perfect adjustment may never be quite attained, but the tendency of things is plainly towards it; and when the world is close upon it each individual will be able to exercise all his faculties spontaneously, freely, and beneficially, since all anti-social faculties will by then have been "evolved away."

The meaning of this ultimate ideal as regards our conduct in the present life is that what we should aim at is the highest degree of self-realisation which is compatible with equal freedom of self-development on the part of others. This general principle underlies all sound ethical codes, and supplies a sort of philosophical touchstone of social right and wrong.

From this point of view men will regard themselves as inheritors of mental, emotional, and physical faculties, which it is their duty and privilege to exercise to the full in the most beneficial way. The old Christian ideal was one of self-immolation by way of apprenticeship to heaven; the new Rationalist ideal is self-development by way of reaching the highest possible level of welfare and usefulness on earth. To realise that ideal a full measure of earnestness and

self-control is required. The process is not simply one of instinctive expression; it is one of self-education. Tennyson's majestic lines on this matter have never been surpassed:—

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power;
Yet not for power—power of itself would come
uncalled for,
But to live by law, acting the law we live by
without fear,
And because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.

The practical outcome of Rationalism is, therefore, an incentive to an active existence, in which the intellect is trained to its fullest usefulness, the moral faculty developed to the highest point of strength and sensitiveness, and the emotional and æsthetic sides of human nature allowed ample play to colour the path of mental and moral duty.

I have previously stated that the proportion of *Daily Telegraph* letters in which the Rationalist outlook on the question of belief is expressed, is not a large one. But it is noticeable that, for one reason or another, the later collections of letters have been much more freely leavened with statements of Rationalist or semi-Rationalist opinions.

A few extracts from these letters are necessary to round off our analysis of the *Daily Telegraph* correspondence, as well as to show how the ideals of Rationalism are impressing themselves upon the general public.

The first extract shows Rationalism in its practical moral aspect:—

I still had my reason as my guide. Instead of paying homage to the "Gods," I turned my attention to the service of man. I found that the only true philosophy was the philosophy of this life—the only life we really know of, although many of us still dream

of a life to come. Well, there is no harm in believing in a future life, so long as we do not allow the concerns of this life to be interfered with by this consideration. What man really wants is a practical belief—one that will make him a good citizen, a good husband, a good father, and a faithful friend. Man wants a creed, but it must be a creed that is based upon science—that is, upon the latest deductions from the observed order of phenomena, and, therefore, it can never be a fixed creed, but must be susceptible of modification, by growth, with every addition man gets to his knowledge. And it must be a creed the sole aim of which is the happiness and progress of the human race. And if there should turn out to be another life, no God of goodness can ever blame a man who has done his best to render the lives of others happy in this.

A similar point of view, expressed with more emphasis on the critical side, is embodied in the following:—

Do I believe? Yes. I believe that a wider knowledge and acceptance of evolution, combined with the greater desire of men to labour in the service of man, will be the distinguishing characteristics of the twentieth century. The reluctance of the clergy to embrace the theory of evolution and to recognise the facts that Nature is uniform in action and that the law of causation is universal are two of the chief causes which have contributed to the possibility of this correspondence. I have no quarrel with a rational Christianity; but when I am asked to accept a belief in which miracles and supernaturalism are among its chief characteristics, and to confine my faith to the literal translation of a book which I believe to be a hindrance to human progress, then I can no longer attend any church where theology of this description is tolerated.

Mine has been a hard and chequered career, but through it all I believe I have led a fairly upright and honest life, and, if I continue to do so, I shall not expect any particular reward after death; neither do I fear any punishment. If it can be said of me that "he understood humanity, and worked in the service of men," it is all I desire.

Another Rationalist contributor asserts that "*if the recorded experience of man-*

kind makes any one principle clearer than another to the discerning mind, it is this—that the conscious pursuit of truth and justice, not a problematical 'happiness,' is humanity's best security for ensuring individual and social well-being." This is, in its way, an epitome of the moral side of the Rationalist ideal, which finds eloquent expression in another letter:—

What of the future? A more glorious ideal is slowly being evolved. It is becoming recognised that to do good without reward hereafter is loftier in essence than the righteousness which is produced by hope of infinite happiness. I look to a combination of stoicism, altruism, morality, and the love of work as the guiding star of the future; while the conviction that men and women can only force their way upwards against the forces of nature, by strenuous and painful effort, must increase the sympathy, the pity, and the love which workers and fighters in the same cause should feel for each other, however diverse their positions in the strife.

In these and other statements of Rationalist opinions, as in the whole body of Rationalist literature, one can perceive a spirit of intellectual buoyancy which is in striking contrast to the hesitancy which marks a large number of the affirmative answers to "Do we Believe?"

It is the fashion to decry Rationalism as "dreary" or "barren," but no one can say that its adherents are the apostles of inaction or despair. The gloom of unbelief is supposed to overshadow their spirits, but we find instead a strong confidence in human nature and in the possibilities of life which show that the shedding of the old beliefs does not leave a man without the foundations of hope in the world.

Thus, while the supernatural believer pities the "unbeliever," the Rationalist

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